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VOL. 1045.

STEVEN LAWRENCE BY MRS. EDWARDS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

THE
JOURNAL OF THE
ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE
OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND
PUBLISHED BY THE INSTITUTE
OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

Volume 100, Part 1
1970
PUBLISHED BY THE INSTITUTE
OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND
11, BEDFORD SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.1

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STEVEN LAWRENCE,

YEOMAN.

BY

MRS. EDWARDS,

AUTHOR OF "ARCHIE LOVELL."

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1869.

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STEVEN LAWRENCE, YEOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

The Last Appeal.

STEVEN came on the following morning punctually at the hour that Dot had ordered him, and was received in due form as an accepted suitor by the Squire and Mrs. Hilliard. He came again next day for exactly one hour and a half; and the next; but without seeing Katharine; and so matters went on for a week. It gave him a secret, a poignant pleasure all this time to feel that Miss Fane avoided him. If she were wholly indifferent to his engagement, he thought, she had been glad to meet him, and to let her indifference be seen. And at last he got so far as to ask Dot, in a tone of voice not very palpably forced, how it was he never saw anything of her cousin? Was Miss Katharine away from home or ill? He hoped not ill.

"Oh, Katharine is at home," answered Dot; "but I fancy she has not liked to interrupt us yet. I shall tell her," looking up with pretty archness in his face, "that you are tired of being tête-à-tête already—you bad Steven! and ask her to be in the room when you come to-morrow. You will find her looking very pale," Dot ran on. "Just think, when old Mr. Ducie was calling yesterday he mistook her for the eldest, and

offered her his congratulations. Her colour is quite gone—poor Kate! Really and truly, Steven, I don't think it kind of Lord Petres to remain abroad so long."

All that night Steven lay awake, burning with the old fever of doubts and fears—ay, and with the old fever of hope, where no hope was—and next morning, more than half an hour before his accustomed time, made his appearance at the Dene. Thanks to this half-hour he found Miss Fane alone in the drawing-room. Dora, whose leading ideas of an engagement, as of all other human affairs, were connected with dress, was still busy in her room over a charming little morning gown of white muslin and rose-coloured taffetas, a surprise—I speak in Dora's language—for Steven; and Katharine, who had no thought of his appearing before the usual hour, was at her piano, singing to herself that saddest love song that I think ever flowed even from the pen of Gluck: the old, old, ever-sweet "Eurydice."

Steven came in unannounced, for already he was treated as a member of the family in the house, and had listened to two or three bars, sung in Katharine's plaintive voice, before she saw him, and broke off. He had resolved to be thoroughly stranger-like and self-possessed on this, their first meeting, so begged coldly that he might not "interrupt her in her practice."

"My practice is over," cried Katharine, her face all blushes. "I choose an early hour so as to inflict as little on other people as possible. If you had once heard me sing, Mr. Lawrence, you would not wish to be in the room with my practising going on."

"I *have* heard you," answered Steven. "The first

Sunday I was home—that Sunday I met you outside Clithero Church, do you remember? I stood under the chancel window and listened to the hymn after the sermon—I mean listened to your voice!”

Whenever they met, the book opened at the same page; whenever he looked at her, Steven’s eyes got back the tenderness which in itself was a confession. Katharine crossed the room, her head erect, her heart hotly beating, and stood at his side before the mantelpiece. What, had she sunk so low, she asked herself, that she must submit to sentimental speeches, to covert love-making, from this man now that he was Dora’s suitor? He must be shown at once, shown pretty plainly, upon what kind of terms their intimacy for the future must stand! Then aloud, and in a marvelously grave calm voice, “Mr. Lawrence,” she said, “I need hardly tell you how glad I am to see you in our house again—how unaffectedly glad of the cause which brings you here! I congratulate you on your engagement most heartily!” And she offered him her hand.

He took it: and in spite of the resolution of each the two poor foolish hands trembled in each other’s clasp. “It seems more than eight weeks since I was here,” said Steven, holding her hand tight, and looking down upon her face: white and changed that dear face looked to him now that the blushes had faded from it. “Of course I know that it’s only eight weeks—it was on the sixth of July that I took you in my boat to Ashcot. Measuring the time by what I’ve suffered it seems nearer upon eight years, Miss Fane.”

Katharine drew her hand away instantly. “I really don’t see what you should have had to suffer, Mr.

Lawrence! Papa has spoken of you sometimes, wondering you never came to see him, but from what he said I should think you have been amusing yourself pretty well. You were at Newmarket with Lord Haverstock, I heard. You have already made plenty of friends in the neighbourhood."

"Amusing myself!" said poor Steven, with a sort of groan. "Yes, you must know how much! You must know whether I have been trying to find pleasure or stupefaction."

"Indeed I do not," answered Katharine, unwisely dwelling on the subject. "When I saw you last you were walking with . . . some person from the village, I think! You were looking in very good spirits, and I was delighted to see you so."

"And you were with the rector," said Steven. "Yes, that was the night I went desperate! After you passed me you laughed—I can hear how your voice sounded now—you laughed, and looked up in the parson's face and I swore to myself to be a man and get over my folly. Next day I went to London, went down to Newmarket with Lord Haverstock, and—well, I've been trying ever since to forget it all—and I haven't! I have been with you three minutes," he exclaimed passionately, "and my madness is back upon me—worse than ever!"

Every tender, every pitying womanly fibre of Katharine's nature was stirred by his voice. "Listen to him!" cried her heart, in one last unavailing revolt. "Listen to him, while to listen is still no sin." "Turn from him!" cried reason; "blush for your own pitiful weakness, and turn from him!" And the conflict, this time, was not of long duration. "You make me feel

that I have done well not to see you hitherto," she said, very low. "You make me feel how wrong it is of me to speak to you now. It was by my cousin's wish. I—I will never see you alone again."

"You will do as you like," was Steven's answer. "Keep away from me, or see me; what have I to do with your actions or your resolves? As long as I live I shall never be a hypocrite, with you at least. Whenever you do see me I shall speak the truth. I told you that evening at Ashcot I wasn't likely to cure of my madness, whatever happened. I tell you so now."

"And telling me this, and feeling this—if, indeed, anything you say or feel is sincere—will you tell me why you have asked my cousin to be your wife?" cried Katharine, indignantly. "Is it not enough for two people to be mis—I mean," she interrupted herself, colouring violently, "is there any occasion why poor little Dora should be sacrificed too?"

"I don't believe that Miss Dora will be sacrificed," said Steven coldly. "Your cousin knows that she will command my whole duty—my duty, and as much as I have to give of affection—and so she takes me. You want to know why I asked her to marry me? Well, I can't tell you; I have put that question to myself pretty often during the last few days, and have not been able to answer it yet. From very despair, perhaps; I knew Miss Dora did not dislike me, and I knew, for very certain, that I could make myself no more miserable than I was. Perhaps I thought—how do I know—that by marrying her I should bring myself ever so little nearer to you, should have a chance of touching your hand, of hearing your voice once or twice a twelvemonth, should have a right to feel that

I was at least *something* to you—the low-born husband that your cousin had stooped to marry . . . My God!” he interrupted himself, “mustn’t the manhood have left a man before he can degrade himself by words like these!” Then he stopped short.

Katharine Fane’s head drooped low. “If you degrade yourself,” she said, “you degrade me more. In such a position as ours, for me to be forced to listen to your words is a humiliation greater than I will bear. You will not meet me as a friend, I see plainly, and so, except in the presence of others, we will never meet at all. If—if all you say were true,” she added; “if indeed you cared for me, sir, you would not subject me to pain like this!”

“Miss Fane,” answered Steven, slowly and deliberately, “what you say is perfectly true; if I loved you as I once did, I could not, I dare not open my lips to give you pain—but I do not!” She gave a start and looked up piteously in his face; looked with an expression that seemed to cry: “Stab me with your bitter words, humiliate me with your contempt, do anything but cease to love me!” But Steven went on resolutely: “No, I do not. Poor Miss Dora will command my duty, as I told you, and such feeling as I have for you isn’t likely to change. The woman I *loved* is dead. Yes,” he repeated blankly, “dead, or rather, she never lived at all save in my own ignorant fancy. I got her picture months ago, Miss Fane! I saw a pair of beautiful eyes, a soft-cut mouth, and I said those were eyes that could love honestly, lips that could speak brave words, and give a man brave kisses, and if I could win them they should be mine. Savage though I was, I had my own poor notions, you see, as

to the qualities a true woman should possess, and in my folly I gave them all to Dora Fane—to the picture I mean, that night and day lay upon my heart.”

Steven’s voice had softened to its old tremulous, pleading tone; and Katharine’s bowed head sank lower still. After a minute: “Well, I came back,” he went on, more calmly, “came back, and you know the rest! I met poor Miss Dora, and I felt that I was just as indifferent to her as to any woman I had ever seen in my life, I met——”

“Oh, go on,” cried Katharine, as he hesitated. “Let nothing be omitted from your story. You saw the original of the picture, and found that she did not possess the fine qualities of your beau ideal. Is that what you would say?”

“I saw the original of the picture,” said Steven, “fairer than I had thought to find her, gracious, kind, and with a voice sweeter, if that could be, than her face—but all on the surface! A woman of the world, a woman to lure men on with her beauty alone, living for herself and for her own vanity, excellently suited, I’ve no doubt, for the position of life she is going to marry into; and so—you know after what death pangs! my love, my reverence, not my madness, has passed away. The woman I dreamed of once is dead;” saying which, he took the locket that held Katharine’s photograph from his breast. “I have no right to wear her picture. The real Dora, God help her! is all I have got to think of now.” And as he spoke, quietly, not without dignity, Steven Lawrence put down the locket on the mantelpiece, and walked a step or two away from Miss Fane’s side.

If he had raised his hand to strike her, the blow

could scarcely have caused her humiliation so intense as thrilled through poor Katharine's heart in this moment. She had been accustomed hitherto to the way in which men of shallower passions, of finer breeding than Steven's, take their doom; to being told that in spite of her cruelty, she would ever remain an ideal of all earthly and divine perfection; her picture the dearest possession left to console the sufferer—with other like phrases in use in drawing-room love. This plain, coarse avowal that while Steven's "madness" for her remained unaltered, his blind respect, his chivalrous reverence for her was over, seemed to her the cruellest of insults. Yet still—incomprehensible mystery of love—Katharine Fane knew, even in the depth of her bitterness, that it was more possible to forgive him *so*, than if respect, if reverence, had continued intact, and a fairer face than hers had led his senses captive.

"I never gave you my picture, Mr. Lawrence. Remember, it has been of your own free will that you have chosen to wear it. Nothing is easier than to take it out. See, I bear no malice! I will do it for you myself."

She took up the locket, raised its glass, and in another instant the photograph, Steven's companion day and night for so many months, was torn neatly into four pieces, and thrown into the fire-place. Just as the sacrifice was completed came the patter of Dot's high-heeled slippers along the passage, and Katharine, in a sort of guilty confusion, and not remembering what she was about, hid away the locket in her hand.

"I am so sorry I couldn't come sooner!" cried Dot, as she tripped in, quite a picture of white muslin and cherry-coloured bows, and with a Mimi Pinson plate of

lace on her short fair hair. "Oh, Kate is here! then I know you haven't missed *me*. How d'ye do, dear Steven?" Dot was not a foolishly-shy person, and held up her face to her lover no more embarrassed by the presence of a third person than if she had been awaiting a kiss from Uncle Frank. "Now mind—I shall be horribly, dreadfully angry unless you tell me this instant every word you have both been saying."

It was a plain gold locket that Steven had bought, second-hand, from the store of a Jew pawnbroker in Vera Cruz; a locket whose intrinsic worth was certainly not more than twenty-five shillings, and throughout the whole remainder of that day Katharine Fane felt sorely puzzled what to do with her unlawful possession. To return it empty to its owner was a cruelty that, whatever his deserts, she could not practise towards him; give it to Dora her heart would not let her! So the only course left practically open seemed to be, to keep it herself. Some day, she thought, when Steven's senses had returned, she might give it to him; he would be Dot's husband then; and perhaps with her own picture in it once more, as a peace-offering. He might be willing to take back in friendship what he had flung away from him in love!

And when night came and she was alone, Miss Fane opened an inner drawer of her trinket-case, and, quite apart from diamonds, pearls, sapphires, and the rest of Lord Petres' gifts, hid the locket away. A branch of withered wild roses lay at its side.

CHAPTER II.

Married.

THEY never met alone after this day. Every forenoon, at the same hour precisely, Steven arrived, to go through his courtship; occasionally was made to stay for lunch; once or twice came, by set invitation, to dinner. But Katharine saw him alone no more. She was thoroughly gracious to him, in her manner, before Dora; with a generosity that alternately angered and stabbed him with contrition did her utmost to bring out whatever good there was in her cousin's character in his presence; whenever it chanced that strangers were by would show, by a sweet and unaffected familiarity towards him, that Dora's own relations, at least, saw no misalliance in the approaching marriage. "If she has no heart," he would say to himself, every time he quitted her, "she is so perfect an actress, has a tact so excellent in her way of imitating one, that a man might pass his life in heaven at her side, and never be sensible of the deficiency." The very quality, in short, which he had held to be the canker, the flaw of her nature, becoming a new and cogent reason for him to love her the more.

The engagement, happily, was not a long one. The business arrangements connected with the marriage were soon over, Steven absolutely refusing to touch a farthing of his betrothed's small dowry, and insisting that capital and interest should be left in her hands; and after this (a week in London having sufficed to buy more silks and laces than there seemed a possibility of ever wearing in Ashcot) Dot began to think that she need not

make the poor fellow wait any longer. October was a pleasant month in Paris—cool, yet sufficiently summer-like to be out of doors all day; it was an idle time, too, dear Steven said, on the farm, and everything at Ashcot would be ready by then for her reception. As well let the first of October, a fortnight from the present time, be fixed on for the wedding day. Laces and silks being temporarily in abeyance, the question of wedding-guests was next an all-important one to Dot's mind. Katharine's advice was to keep the marriage absolutely private; none but members of their own family present, or such friends of Steven's as he chose to invite. But to this Dora would not listen. "It looks exactly as if we were ashamed of it," she said. "When you are married to Lord Petres you may have a hundred guests, or six, and the world will call it right. In marrying a man like Steven, unless I take up a position at first, show that I mean to raise him to my class instead of sinking to his, no one will ever visit me at all. I am quite determined to have the Ducies for bridesmaids, and Lady Haverstock and everybody else at the breakfast. As to asking any of Steven's friends," added Dot, "it is out of the question. I have spoken to him about it, and he wishes to leave every arrangement regarding the wedding in my hands."

And so to poor Katharine fell the task of bringing the Ducies of Ducie, proud old Lady Haverstock, and "everybody else," together at the wedding-feast of Steven Lawrence of Ashcot! A less gifted tactician would certainly have failed in the attempt. The older people remembering the Lawrences as plain working yeomen—at a time when yeomen, as a class, existed—would almost as soon, under ordinary circumstances,

have thought of appearing at the marriage of a day-labourer. Younger ones looked upon Steven much as they looked upon Mills the horsedealer, or any other of Lord Haverstock's boon-companions in the village; and had cards or invitations been sent out in the usual fashion it is doubtful whether a single acceptance would have been the result. Katharine's line of diplomacy was this: She rode over alone one morning to see Lady Haverstock, had a long confidential talk with her about the marriage, then just as she was leaving, asked the old lady, affectionately, if she would be present at it. "Steven Lawrence is not, I dare say, what these good people—people, half of them of yesterday themselves! would call a gentleman," said Katharine, "so we shall have a very quiet homely wedding. Lord Petres, I hope, will be here for it, and his sister, if Lord Scudamore is better. Dear Lady Haverstock I hope *you* will please Dora and mamma by coming to the church to look at us?"

Lady Haverstock, with Katharine holding her hand and waiting for her reply, could of course do nothing but accept: and after this no further invitations were sent out. People began to talk, to wonder, to feel angry that they were not asked. "Lady Haverstock and her son, and Lord Petres," said the Miss Ducies of Ducie, "and the Countess of Scudamore, and to leave *us* out! We had better go and call. It would be very disagreeable to have any coolness with the Hilliards now"—that Katharine Fane was engaged to marry Lord Petres! So the Miss Ducies came to call, asked in tones of interest about Dora's wedding dress; were quite anxious to know Mr. Steven Lawrence; had seen him several times with Lord Haverstock, and thought him

so like the picture of the Emperor of Austria—was it possible Miss Fane did not see the likeness? finally were told by Katharine that they might come to Clithero church arrayed in natural flowers and white muslin dresses on the first, if they chose. With Lady Haverstock and her son as guests, and the Miss Ducies as bridesmaids, the difficulty now was rather whom to leave out than whom to invite. Everybody accepted: everybody, if they did not think Steven like the Emperor of Austria, thought him a young man of decided promise, a young man whose future after he married Dora Fane would lie in his hands; and as the day approached, Dot, with an exultant heart felt that a dozen of the most exclusive people in Kent, people many of whom had not gone to Arabella's wedding would be present at hers.

A dozen or fifteen irreproachable people as wedding guests; Lord Haverstock—for this Dora herself had intrigued—as best man; with Katharine, the two Miss Ducies, and old Grizelda Long, the Phantom, as she was more generally called among her friends, as bridesmaids. . . But as Grizelda is destined to play a part of greater importance than that of bridesmaid in Steven's marriage, she must be allowed to make her bow with formality on first appearing before the foot-lights.

Who was Grizelda Long? Had she a mother—had she a brother? No one knew. She had gone on leading her phantom nomadic existence until people had ceased to speculate whether she had human relationships or not; had ceased, indeed, to regard her otherwise than as a dispensation of Providence, an ultimate fact incapable of solution or analysis. A dreaded presence which even a woman like Mrs. Dering had

not the courage to expunge from her balls and At Homes—it was at wedding festivities, above all others, that the face of Grizelda Long (like the flower-crowned death's-head of the Egyptians) was certain of being seen. The clerk and pew-opener at St. George's knew her well; to the young men from Gunter's she was familiar as one of the plaster-of-paris devices upon their own cakes. If a bride was making a good marriage Grizelda must not be left out, because the poor dear creature had really been so indefatigable in running about to match silks and spur on milliners for the trousseau, and besides, would have *such* malicious things to say unless bought off with a bridesmaid's locket. If a bad one, Grizelda must come because she was just one of those amphibious creatures, those human connecting links, who are so convenient, as padding, or buffers, to put between different strata of guests at a breakfast-table. You might have slipped Grizelda in between a bishop and the most scandalously vulgar of the bridegroom's relations, and by virtue of her apologetic mild flatteries to his lordship, her mysterious latent affinities with the abominable new cousin—have offended neither. What were Grizelda's means of life? There were people who had been intimate with her for a dozen years or more who could not answer that question. It was whispered that, somewhere Knights-bridge way, there existed a modest establishment, half-lodging, half-boarding house, an establishment held together by a forlorn old maid or two, and chance Indian widows, and of which poor Grizelda was, in fact, the chief. But these were whispers only. No ordinary human creature could for certain have discharged these domestic duties and at the same time have haunted

every ball and wedding and flower-show about town as did Grizelda. And many persons held it was but the weird ubiquity, the unholy will-o'-the-wisp-like habits of the creature in pervading, or appearing to pervade, every house of every one she knew at once, which first called the Knightsbridge legend into existence.

No one could, with an approximation to accuracy, fix the epoch at which Grizelda first appeared on the earth. Middle-aged matrons, mothers of tall boys and girls, could distinctly remember her flitting to and fro, match-maker and match-marrer, by turns, in the love-affairs of their youth. Accurate old gentlemen, when closely questioned, would not distinctly swear to any given year in which Grizelda was *not*. The young and flippant openly believed her to be a sort of unshriven houseless soul, a wandering female Jew who had roamed, partnerless, through ball-rooms, an unmated bridesmaid through weddings, from the beginning of time. Grizelda pursued you throughout a whole London season. For three months you could scarcely go to a ball without seeing the well-known battered wreath, the well-known battered face peering, eager-eyed, through folding-doors, and up and down staircases after the young men who had promised (not always unsolicited) to give her a dance, and when the time came, fled! And you went to the Rhine or Paris and found her there—"travelling with friends," Grizelda would say; in reality, part-dragonness, part-courier, to some young woman, or women, not quite strong-minded enough to travel alone, and who found the good Grizelda, whether as foil, blind, interpreter, or friend, useful. There was no need to be troubled with conversation-guides or polyglot washing-books when you

had got dear Grizelda of your party. For the purposes of luggage or the laundry she could speak any amount of execrable foreign tongues; and then, it was so impossible to offend Grizelda! And she was so indefatigable in beating up or making acquaintance for you in continental towns, so good in sleeping up five pair of stairs, or on a sofa, or in going to church when every one else was tired, or in fighting over the hotel bills, and it would be so easy to have done with her when you got back to town! This last clause, however, while wishing to pay every other tribute to her virtues, I am disposed to dispute wholly. When Miss Long had once fastened on a friend she generally held to him, and with no wavering grasp. You might ask Grizelda to your house and she would come, and malign you meekly to every one next day; or you might not ask her, and she would malign you more meekly still, and regretting that your acquaintances were not *quite* what she cared to meet. But you could not have done with her. People who in the heart of a German forest or on the top of Mont Blanc weakly asserted such a thing to be possible would confess afterwards, in sack-cloth and ashes, that they had reckoned without their guest. Snubbing only brought the Phantom with additional humility to your doorstep; cutting was no more fatal to her than to an earth-worm: desperate under her persecution, if you laid a cruel hand on what in any other human being had been pride or self-respect, Grizelda would walk away, as unscathed as the daddy-long-legs who, in quiet unconcern, leaves one of his limbs still quivering under your finger!

Perhaps a little real honest kindness might have exorcised her, as holy water is said to exorcise other

phantoms; but this poor Grizelda never got. People invited her; travelled with her; made every kind of use of her; gave her handsome presents; believed "she was good-hearted, and made mischief more from desire of bringing herself forward than out of malice." But no one liked her. Was this a proof of her demerits? If, instead of being lodged in that curiously unlovely tenement, Grizelda Long's thirst for action and dauntless courage had been the portion of a fairer woman, might not she—when she and time were in their youth—have been loved, and so done well? Turned into legitimate channels were not the elements of more than common worth in this restless, energetic, sympathy-craving nature that now had soured and hardened into what it was after long contact with poverty and the world? If the Knightsbridge legend had—as I believe it had—truth in it, did that tell no story of pathetic under-currents in Grizelda's life? When the old face at which Cornet Lightfoot (invited to the ball through Grizelda's agency) had laughed with his gay little partner of seventeen last night—when the old face that had looked so incongruous under its flowers and in the gas-light got up in the early grey next morning to see after the poor menial duties of the household—that the charwoman had carried home no broken meats over-night, that the sardines and new-laid egg were ready for the capricious Indian widow, the stay of the house—must there not have been something almost heroic in its expression? The world has no time to make suppositions—to give credit for bushel-hidden or potential virtues. Grizelda Long was a bitter-tongued old maid who had once, centuries ago, managed to get herself into society and had miraculously kept her

head above water ever since: a creature plain to look at, disagreeable to be with, but whom even Mrs. Dering was afraid to leave out of her parties—a creature, in fine, whom every one shook hands with, and whom no one liked! The hard work in the Knightsbridge boarding-house, the courage that could bravely wear a silk dress over an empty stomach, the craving to be up and doing that, in default of other excitement, would make poor old Grizelda head a band of school-children on Wimbledon Common, or collect money from house to house to build a pauper church in St. Giles's. . . . None of these things did the world see or take into account. Even Katharine Fane, of all human creatures the aptest to divine whatever real good lay in man or woman, never could bring herself to see aught but the unloveliness of Grizelda Long!

“Of course every one you wish to have at your wedding shall come,” she said to Dora, “even the Phantom; but why not ask her as a guest only? All your other bridesmaids will be young, and tolerably good-looking, remember. Could anything be more grotesque than to see Grizelda Long in white muslin and with natural flowers in her hair, walking at the side of little Alice Ducie?”

But Dora was obstinate. If Grizelda came at all it must be as a bridesmaid. Grizelda would be horribly affronted at finding herself ranked with Mrs. Ducie and the other elderly wedding guests; and Dora would run no risk of forfeiting her goodwill. Grizelda knew numbers of people in London and Paris; knew people all over the world; and the bride elect, looking forward already to sometimes quitting her husband and

Ashcot, foresaw that the day might come in which even the Phantom could be of use to her.

That day, alas! came sooner than Dora herself expected.

Golden September waned. There were bright soft noons, and glorious autumn sunsets, and nights with a ring of sharpness in the air, and a yellow harvest moon shining above the hazy foreland, and showing the low farm-walls of Ashcot, white and distinct, across Clithero Bay. Never had days and nights seemed, each as it passed, so slow to Katharine; yet never, collectively, had they sped on so quick to an undesired end. The evening of the thirtieth came: for the last time she stood in her old place on the terrace: for the last time thought over the bitter-sweetness of the "day that was dead!" Then came a few hours' broken sleep, a feverish dream of some wedding party, in which she could never tell whether Lord Petres or Steven was the bridegroom, and where now Dot, now the Phantom, now Alice Ducie, but never herself, stood before the altar, veiled, and in orange-blossoms; and then Katharine Fane came back abruptly to the truth! found the sun shining, and Dora standing by her bedside, and remembered, with a shudder, that it was Steven's wedding-day.

"A beautiful dry day!" cried Dot, as much excited about the weather as if she had been going to a flower-show or a garden party. "Get up quick, Kate. I find Heath has sent my wreath too big after all, and I won't trust any one but you to alter it."

"Dear Dora!" said Katharine, holding out her arms to her cousin, "I'm so glad that the sun shines to-day."

"So am I," said Dora, with sincerity. "An umbrella and over-shoes would spoil the prettiest bride in the world!"

Millinery, even on her marriage-morning, was the note that ever ran through all Dot's emotions. Honestly, I don't believe she remembered Steven's existence, until she saw him waiting for her at the altar, so taken up was she in the white satin and wreath, the veil and bouquet, and Honiton to which, from her point of view, the bridegroom was but an adjunct. And Katharine must do everything for her! Dora's poor narrow heart hated Mrs. Hilliard's maid, with a hatred dating back from the time when this woman had altered the Parisian silk dress for little Kate, and would neither let her nor Mrs. Hilliard see her until she was dressed. "'Tis the last thing you will ever do for me, Kate," she said, as Katharine fastened on her veil and flowers. "I should have detested myself if any hands in the house but yours had dressed me to-day." And so difficult to please was Dot, so scrupulous about the folds of her veil, the arrangement of the little baby curls, the exact height at which her wreath must be placed upon her forehead, that Katharine had scarcely had time for more than a glance at her own face, white as the dress she wore, in the glass, when the Squire knocked at the door, and called out cheerily that the carriages were waiting, and if Dora meant to be married to-day she had no time to lose.

It was not a large wedding after all. Lord Petres had not yet returned to England, neither did his sister make her appearance—hence, such people as were left out regretted that those who went should have been invited by Miss Fane under false pretences. Mrs. De-

ring, as Dot had foretold, was suffering too severely from one of her old headaches to be able to do more than send her best wishes and a tea-pot and service, something really useful, to the bride. The Squire, Dora, and Katharine went in one carriage, the three bridesmaids in another; and at the church, for Steven had expressed no wish to be additionally married at Shiloh, Lady Haverstock and her son, with about a dozen other guests, met them. Not a large but a very charming wedding, public opinion said: did a wedding ever take place in the world that was not called charming? A lovely bride, a handsome bridegroom, young Lord Haverstock as best man, the three prettiest girls in Kent as bridesmaids (long practice had taught poor Grizelda to bow her face down over her bouquet, and generally keep herself quiet and unseen), and no inauspicious tears or emotion of any kind to mar the effect of the ceremony.

When it was over, Steven, who throughout looked like a man in a dream, had twice to receive whispered admonitions from the old clerk before he collected himself sufficiently to offer his arm to his wife, and take her away to the vestry. "Very naturally," said the Clithero people, who were looking on from the body of the church. "Master Lawrence was a dissenter, and didn't know the ways of the gentry and the church-people." And not all the hand-shaking and congratulations he went through when the signing of names was complete seemed sufficient to rouse him to a sense of his happiness. Was he really overcome—not master of his own feelings—or only shy, poor fellow, and without manner? the people wondered who had honoured him by attending his marriage. When the

bride and bridegroom left the church the crowd of village-people who were assembled outside gave a cheer, but it was not a very hearty one. Steven Lawrence marrying a niece of the Squire's lady was an event so out of all established order or precedence as to have upset the whole mental equilibrium of the parish: and the cheer rang neither with the hearty respect men would have shown had Dora Fane married a gentleman, nor the honest frank sympathy they would have felt for Steven had he chosen his bride from his own class. He nodded to such of his old friends as he saw, all of whom looked hot and uncomfortable under the salutation; then Katharine's school-children came forward, dressed in white, to strew flowers—a custom never seen before in Clithero and set down at once as black papistry: and after this Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence entered the Squire's carriage and drove away.

"It went off beautifully, did it not?" cried Dot, much as if she had been speaking of private theatricals or a dinner party. "But you were so absent, Steven; I am not sure that you saw whether I looked well or not."

"Indeed, I saw you, my dear," said Steven, turning to her with a curious sort of pity on his face; "I saw you, and thought I had never seen you look so pretty before." And he took her hand, the bride first carefully transferring her bouquet and handkerchief to her lap, and gave it a grasp which almost brought the tears into Mrs. Lawrence's eyes.

What he answered was strictly true. He *had* looked at her as she walked up the aisle upon the Squire's arm: the brilliant skin, the great dark eyes,

the golden baby-locks, all softened and made youthful under the bridal veil: and had thought he never saw poor Miss Dora look so pretty before. He had likewise wondered at what period of his life the vision of that doll-bride could have appeared before his eyes already. And in an instant—the wedding-party watching him, marvelling to see with what quiet good-breeding the yeoman bridegroom awaited his bride—memory had answered the question. Once, years ago, in New Orleans, he had gone in with some of his mates to see a show of dwarfs. “The real original General Lilliput and his family,” said the advertisement: at all events, an assemblage of mature human-creatures between three and five feet in height. And of this pitiful troupe the principal lady had been dressed as a bride: “The same dress,” according to the showman, “that she wore on the occasion of her marriage with the illustrious General.” Well, the tiny hands, the consequential walk, the floss-silk hair, the too-pink cheeks of this poor morsel of humanity all came vividly back before Steven as his bride approached the altar: the resemblance heightened when he heard Dot’s voice, harsh and disproportioned as had been the small lady’s in the New Orleans show, pronouncing the first necessary “I will.” And the grotesque likeness so haunted him throughout the ceremony, that even when he was on his knees receiving the rector’s blessing, it was by an effort that he brought himself to feel the sacredness of the place and of what he was about and not smile. During these ten minutes, which hung a millstone round his neck for ever—which separated him irrevocably from the woman he loved, all he remembered was that show in New Orleans! all he

felt was the absurd outward incongruity between himself and the kneeling baby of thirty at his side! Probably if some of the men who have gone to execution so staunchly could have recorded their experience when it was over, they would have told us it was a little stain upon the axe, an accidental irregularity of the cord, which occupied their senses at the last.

"I only looked at you once," said Dot, after a time, finding it necessary, if conversation was to be kept up at all, that she should start a subject, "and then, Steven, I declare I thought you were smiling. But perhaps it was my own agitation—you know I saw through my tears."

"Your—your tears?" answered the bridegroom, absently: a sharp turn in the road had brought into sight the carriage immediately behind them—the carriage which held Katharine Fane . . . and after this neither of them spoke again till they reached the Dene.

"After all, what can one have to talk about?" thought Dot, leaning back, and resigning herself to visions of her travelling dress: "The situation admits of no subject of interest. My violet velvet suit—yes, I'm glad the day is turning chilly; nothing looks so English as velvet under a hot sun—violet toquet, white plume—Great heavens!" for the first time to-day the bride's heart beat quick: "I hope Williams has not packed my violet toquet away! Did I—did I remember to tell her I had changed my mind about wearing a bonnet?"

The breakfast went off after the manner of all wedding breakfasts. The bridesmaids of course ought to have taken their places in due form near the bride;

but Lord Haverstock, who had charge of Katharine, got shy and blind at finding himself among so many young women, and led her to the seat where she felt her white cheeks and trembling lips must be surest of notice; exactly opposite, that is to say, to Steven and his wife. Mrs. Hilliard—half imagining herself a bride again, in her silver-grey dress and delicate white-lace draperies—sat and shed tears, and murmured about “Dossy,” and glanced with hysterical meaning at Dora, until old Grizelda leant across with her smelling-salts and a sympathetic hope that Mrs. Hilliard would be able to command *her feelings*, and only think of the beloved bride’s happiness. The Squire, with real agitation, and real tears in his eyes, made a very bad speech; the rector, with professional rhetoric, a very good one. Steven, when he was called upon, said a few words, at least up to the average of bridegroom speeches. Lord Haverstock went through torture horrible to his mother to witness on behalf of the bridesmaids. Finally, Mrs. Hilliard looked at the bride, who rose, blushed, fluttered away from the table, and half an hour later was standing in the drawing-room (suit, toquet, plume, all complete) kissing her dear aunt Arabella, kissing the Miss Ducies, kissing Grizelda, kissing and being kissed by everybody amidst a multitude of farewells.

Well—who shall say how it chanced?—just at this affecting moment of leave-taking the bridegroom, coming out of the dining room, ran face to face against the principal bridesmaid, who happened to be crossing the hall, on some last errand she had to execute for Dora.

“Good-bye,” said Steven, standing still, and looking

at her hard. "Say good-bye to me here, not before all those people."

Katharine raised her eyes to his, and tried to speak, but could not get out a word. Her lips twitched: her hand turned cold and clammy, as Steven caught and held it in his own.

"Good-bye; and the Lord pardon you!" he said, with a suspicion nearer to the truth than he had ever known before dimly breaking on him. "Katharine!" . . . and then a door close beside them opened. The hands that, save in friendship, must never meet again, were parted. All was over.

This was their last farewell. Katharine took her leave of Dora alone, in Mrs. Hilliard's morning-room; and, when the bride and bridegroom drove away, Steven looked in vain, among the crowd of people who stood at the hall-door to see the happy pair start, for her face.

The blood ran in his veins with fever-heat as the carriage bore them along the quiet autumn-scented lanes towards the railway. He forgot "poor Miss Dora;" forgot that he was her husband; forgot everything but the trembling perfect lips, the clay-cold hand of Katharine Fane. If he might go back, he thought; hear her say, "I love you, Steven;" feel her arms round his neck, once—and then die! he were well off. And, even while he thought this, he found himself on the platform at the station, mechanically counting bonnet-boxes under his wife's orders, with the station-master, clerk, porters, signalman, all staring at him as though, by marrying the Squire's niece, he had become a sort of natural phenomenon, or curiosity. After this came the shriek of the engine: more excitement from

Dora about bonnet-boxes; and then they were hurried into a carriage full (with a sense of relief he recognised this) of other passengers, and he knew that Katharine Fane and his love belonged for ever to the past, and that he had started on his wedding tour!

The tidal train, which would have taken them to Folkestone exactly in time to meet the boat, did not stop at the smaller country stations; so they had been obliged to go by the afternoon mail, and when they reached Folkestone, there was still an hour and a half to spare before the steamer left. It was six o'clock; the pale October daylight nearly gone; and, after leaving their luggage at an hotel, Steven proposed that they should saunter out on the beach, to make the time pass.

"Ah—yes!" said Dot, not fond of walking at any time, and thinking especially at present of the dainty boots, the violet velvet, in which her journey to Paris was to be made. "It—it won't rain, I hope?" Then she put her hand, for the first time, under her husband's arm, and, somewhat silently, they went away together for their walk.

There had been rough winds for two or three days before in the channel; and, though it was dead calm now, the tide rolled in with heavy breakers on the beach. Nothing can well be mournfuller than the neighbourhood of the sea in weather like this; oppressive silence for a minute; then, one prolonged wild sob along the shore; then, silence again;—and a grey sky overhead! an expanse of grey, cold water stretching before you, dim and spectre-like, in the twilight! When they had walked some distance—miles it seemed

to Dora, who was tortured by the shingle, and almost running to keep pace with Steven's long stride—"I—I don't like the sound of the sea at all," she cried. "It looks calm, but I'm certain there is a heavy swell somewhere, and nothing makes me so ill as a swell." Dot entertained true French horror of the sea and sea-sickness. "Now, do you think I shall suffer dreadfully, Steven?"

Steven had not heard the first part of what she said, and stopped short. "Suffer? my dear, you shall never suffer, if I can help it!" he said, stooping down over her, and with a new, pitying kindness in his tone. Something at this instant; the pressure of her hand, perhaps: her faltering voice, for she was really tired and out of breath, had, for the first time to-day, reminded him that Dora was not merely a puppet in the wedding-show, but a poor, helpless, little woman, dependent on his affection for the happiness or misery of her future life! And all the manliness of his nature was stirred up by the thought. *She* was his wife. *She*, Dora Fane—not Katharine—had had the courage to love him before the world; to cast in her lot, for good or for evil, with his. "If I can shield you, Dora, you shall never know what it is to suffer again!" And he caught her: for it was dark, and they had wandered far away from houses: and held her almost passionately to his breast.

"Oh—dear Steven!" cried Dora, in a stifled voice. "I know you will be everything that is good to me, only——"

"Only?" said poor Steven, still holding her to his side. "Tell me, Dora; let there be no secrets between us from the first."

"Only my feather," said Dora, putting her hand up to the velvet toquet. "You know, dearest, this is the hat I have got to travel in to Paris!"

CHAPTER III.

Bride and Bridegroom.

"WE are perfectly happy," wrote the bride at the end of a week. "The weather is delightful, Paris full—I will tell you about dress when I see you—and Steven everything that is kind and good. What a pity the only place fit to live in on earth should be so expensive! My dear Kate, tell Uncle Frank *the whole* of his present is gone already, and our hotel bill not paid. To give you an idea of prices—bonnets, small as they are, cost sixty francs. Sixty francs for about three square inches of blond and tulle, and you can't get one *under*! I don't think, on the whole, dearest Steven is as pleased with Paris as I expected him to be."

"And shows his sense too," said the Squire, as Katharine read aloud this part of her cousin's letter. "I'll tell you what, Kate; if they were in any other place in the world and Dot talked of cash running short, I should send some as a matter of course—I know very well Lawrence can't be over-flush of ready-money just now—but the best thing that can happen to them in Paris is—to be obliged to leave it. Sixty francs for three inches of tool!" cried the Squire, testily; "and what need will she have of tool at Ashcot, I should like to know? If her husband wants money to drain his land—and he'll never get a crop until it is drained—I'll help him to every shilling he asks me

for; but I'll not help Mrs. Dora to three-inch Paris bonnets. Give her my love, Kate, and say we expect her home at the end of the fortnight."

The message was given; and five days later old Barbara received a letter from the new Mrs. Steven, to say that they would be back on the sixteenth. "Have something to eat in the house," wrote Dot, in a Napoleonic style that stirred Barbara's wrath to its very depths, "a raised pie or cold pheasant will do, as I can't tell you what hour we shall arrive; and make fires throughout the house, and keep the windows open." Every one of which commands Barbara, I need scarcely say, disobeyed flatly. Where was she to get raised pies and pheasants? The master's favourite dish was cold boiled beef and pickles, and cold boiled beef and pickles should be ready for him. As to fires, Barbara had never lit a fire till November yet—except in sickness—and was not going to begin any such extravagance now. And for open windows! she supposed she knew when to open a house and when to shut it without being taught by Steven's fine-lady wife.

All the jealous pride of poor old Barbara's heart Dot, with her inherent want of tact, had contrived to ruffle in three or four careless lines; and when the evening of the sixteenth came, and the bride and bridegroom returned, Steven found, before he had been home ten minutes, that his wife and Barbara were enemies, and that his house, as in the old days of Mrs. Joshua and his mother, was to be a battle-field.

"You must make allowances for her, Dora," he said, when Barbara, her head erect as a war-horse, had set down a huge piece of beef before them, then stalked in silence from the room. "We must get some

younger woman from the village, I see, to wait upon you, and in the meantime make allowances for Barbara. You will find the old soul honest, and true as steel, when you come to know her better."

"But because the old soul is true as steel is no reason that I am to eat beef as hard as iron!" retorted Dot. "My dear Steven, you may depend upon it old servants are mistakes. We had an old housekeeper at the Dene once, and Uncle Frank was always obliged to ask what day he might be allowed to give a dinner-party. No one values honesty more than I do," added Mrs. Lawrence, "but I value health more, and cold salt beef is just one of the few things I cannot digest."

"Then I will tell Barbara not to give you salt beef again, my dear," said Steven, going on with quiet good appetite at his own dinner. "She knows it is a dish I like, and I suppose got it to please me."

"After I had written and told her to have a pie, or game, or something light for me! and to have fires lit, and the windows open!" cried Dot. "Not one of which orders has she attended to! Steven, is that old creature to be mistress of the house, or am I?"

"You are to be mistress of the house, and of everything and everybody in it," answered Steven, with the good-humour of a man not vitally interested in his subject. "Barbara, as I need not tell you, will stay here always, and you must learn to manage her, my dear. Have what you choose for dinner, have the fires lighted, and the windows shut or open—but please yourself in everything."

And this was the tone of all his replies in future to his wife's complaints. The sunny October weather

turned before long to chill wind and rain, and Dot, shut up in-doors with only her finery to amuse her, and with old Barbara's sullen face for companionship, became about as much bored as you could well imagine a bride to be. Steven was out of doors from morning to night, either at his farm-work, of which there was plenty on his hands, or shooting, or breaking in his horses for the coming hunting-season ("like a man possessed," his wife would say to him, "you seem afraid to sit quiet for five minutes together with your own thoughts!"); but of an evening, and at his meals, he had very little save complaints to listen to. It was horribly dull. It was very strange none of the country people came to call. It was very selfish of Kate to choose this time to be away—Katharine was staying with Mrs. Dering at Brighton. For ten days Dora had sat in different lovely Parisian dresses of an afternoon, and not seen the face of a single visitor yet. What *did* make the parlour fire burn so badly? Was it necessary for her to walk all the way to Shiloh on Sunday, or not? And to these, and to a hundred more small discontents, the tone of Steven's answers was ever the same. He was sorry no one had called. He would have a new grate put in the parlour. It was not at all necessary for Dora to walk to Shiloh on Sunday unless she liked. And then away out of doors again the moment his food was swallowed, to remain there till next meal time, or until nightfall brought him perforce into the house again.

"If he would only contradict me sometimes!" Dot would think when he was gone. "Contradict me, and not get everything done with such horrible obedience, and—and try to look up some one—something in the

shape of amusement for me!" Then, after gazing wearily through the wet windows at the wetter garden, she would go away to her room, to look over her dresses and her bonnets, and speculate as to her chance of wearing them, and wonder whether a wedding-ring and a house of your own, and a change of surname *did* make the country one jot more endurable or not?

With November came a glimpse of brighter weather; and at last, one fine afternoon, Mrs. Ducie of Ducie came to call at Ashcot. Dot, heroic in her small way, and undisheartened by three weeks of fruitless labour at her glass, was elaborately dressed, embroidering at her parlour fire, when these, her first visitors, were ushered in by Barbara's grim voice. She had studied a new way of wearing her short fair locks, in Paris, which gave her more than ever the porcelain marchioness air. Her complexion, helped by friendly half-light, was beautifully carmine and pearl; her dress, her ear-rings, her brooch—all were in the reigning mode of Paris eccentricity, and all, worn by Steven Lawrence's wife at Ashcot, looked about as much out of place as old Barbara, driving in a fine carriage, would have looked in Rotten Row, or in the Champs Elysées.

Nothing could be more civil than the manner of Mrs. Ducie and her daughters. They were quite pleased to see Mrs. Lawrence looking so well; had no idea Ashcot was so delightfully situated; hoped they would soon see her at Ducie, but, if Mr. Lawrence was busy, she must not think about returning a formal visit—and, as soon as they left the house, fell to wondering at Mrs. Lawrence's want of taste and good-feeling in dressing as she did. A plain, neatly-made black silk, a sensible merino, would have looked so

much better in that homely farm parlour; and oh, what a pity Miss Fane, or *some one* who cared for her, did not tell the poor little woman to be less theatrical, less meretricious in her style of making-up!

So decided Mrs. and the Miss Ducies; while Dora, watching their grand carriage and livery-servants, as they drove away, asked herself if the best county society was a prize, when it took the form of morning visits, of very great intrinsic worth, after all! The Ducies had been perfectly civil, perfectly kind; but Steven's wife was acute enough to detect the tone of patronage which ran through all the civility and all the kindness. They had visited her, as the Squire and Kate visited the other farmers' wives at Christmas, as Steven Lawrence's wife, in short, not as Lord Vereker's grand-daughter; and the first tears Dora had shed since her marriage rose into her eyes at the mortification of this thought.

A day or two later, came old Lady Haverstock, who stayed exactly seven minutes, and urged Mrs. Lawrence to take an active part in the village clothing-club, mainly on the ground that this charity was not confined to church-people, but open to all sects and denominations ("as if I care for sects and denominations!" thought Dot). And after this, one by one, the other people who had been present at her wedding-breakfast called or left cards; and Mrs. Lawrence knew that her visiting-list was complete, as far as people of her own former class were concerned.

What was to be her amusement, her occupation in life? she asked herself blankly. On the first Sunday after her return she had gone with her husband to Shiloh. Steven, remembering, perhaps, her former

confessions of Evangelicism, and love for the "Word unadorned," seemed to take it as a matter of course that she should do so; and Dora, for the moment, felt really diverted at the idea of appearing among all the plain old village Methodists in her new character. Any little bit of imposture was a diversion to her, so long as it wore the gloss of novelty; and she chose her simplest dress and bonnet for the occasion, and pinned a flower in her waist-belt, and tripped into Shiloh at Steven's side, with a Methodist hymn-book in her hand, and sang at the top of her voice in the hymns, and, indeed, played the whole part out very prettily. This was well enough for once. Next Sunday she went again, but the situation had lost its piquancy. The congregation sang through their noses; the close air gave her a headache; the old minister's sermon lasted an hour. Could people be expected to go to a place of worship where there were sermons an hour long, and no convenience whatever for falling asleep?

And this Shiloh experiment was repeated in a dozen different forms in her secular life. For once she played at going through dairy-work—actually printed a tiny pat of butter with her own hands; for once she gardened; for once sorted the house-linen; for once went out about the farm with Steven—and every time was amused: and every time when she attempted to go through the same thing again, found some excellent reason for being worn out with fatigue in five minutes. To make a human being who has detested the country for fifteen years take to it with good-will at thirty, the miracle of love would be needed. And no such miracle worked for Dora! It was her fate, she felt, always to fall into the path of life for which she was

least suited. In a hundred other positions—in any other position—she began to think, she would have done better, would at least have wearied herself less. Why, the lives of the washing girls in the Faubourg St. Marceau seemed a bright, a varied lot when she looked back to it (autumn rain against the window, and only the burring tick of the old kitchen clock to interrupt her thoughts) from her lonely parlour at Ashcot. Beating clothes, winter and summer, in the cloudy waters of the Bièvre might not be in itself a genial employment; but at all events those bands of French girls beat in company, and chattered of their lovers, and laughed gaily as they worked, and had their balls on Sunday, and society and some kind of excitement all the days of the week. The lot of people on the stage had ever seemed to Dot one with which, despite its hard work and scanty pay, she had been well contented. And the life of a woman of the world like Mrs. Dering—a life with money, good position, society, operas, balls, fashionable church-going—ah, how easy it would have been to *her* to be a good wife and pleasant hostess, and admirable member of society, in a position like that! Anything but solitude, absence from human faces, remoteness from the show and noise and movement of the world. Anything but the self-contained, unbroken life which, in these early days of marriage, a young wife, if love be in her heart, wishes so fondly, so jealously to prolong!

Thus went by the first few weeks of Dot's new existence. She possessed too little depth of feeling to be really and acutely unhappy. The coldness that Steven's patient kindness to her so thinly masked gave her slight concern; the consciousness of her own chill

and bankrupt heart did not corrode her peace. Her life was dull—duller even than it had been before her marriage; this was all.

And still, and while she would run a dozen times a day to meet her husband with a kiss, and while she had spoken to no younger man than old Mr. Lyte the minister since her return to Ashcot, Steven's future rival already existed in Dora's imagination. "If a man of my own class, of my own ideas had married me," was her constantly-recurring thought, "rich or poor, loving or not loving him, I should at least have some society, at least have the possibility of amusement before me yet."

And although she never, even to herself, admitted that it was so, the man of her own class and of her own ideas meant—a man like Mr. Clarendon Whyte.

CHAPTER IV.

Out of Tune!

MEANWHILE Mr. Clarendon Whyte himself was walking about the Brighton cliff, beautiful as ever, with faultless gloves, Hyperion locks, and perfumed cambric, or taking his varied drive from Hove to Kemptown, and from Kemptown to Hove, in that mail-phaeton with its pair of roans, for which no man has yet known how Clarendon Whyte paid—perfectly oblivious that such a person as Dora Lawrence existed.

If, as Dora to the last hour of her life believed, he had really cared for her before Arabella adroitly turned his affection aside, it must be conceded that Arabella had effected the work of alienation thoroughly. Mr. Clarendon Whyte was just as devoted an ad-

herent to the Dering household here at Brighton as in the days when Dora shared, or believed she shared, his attentions in town; rode with Mrs. Dering when the General was too gouty to mount his horse; walked with her when the evening air was too sharp for the General's asthma; drove out her eldest boy twice a week in his mail phaeton, and dutifully ate all such meals as he was invited to eat in Mrs. Dering's house. The world still observed its old charitable reticence on the score of this friendship; chiefly, no doubt, because Mrs. Dering was one of those women about whom there *can* be no scandal of moment, a little, perhaps, because Clarendon Whyte's poverty shut him out from the surveillance of mothers of families—the class from whom handsome young matrons have ordinarily most to dread. It was, when one came to think of it, a very natural intimacy. Mrs. Dering was a thoroughly exemplary wife to the most disagreeable of old husbands. General Dering himself had grown quite fond of the young man's society. And so, when Miss Fane came down to Brighton about ten days after Steven's marriage, the first person she met was her adversary, Mr. Clarendon Whyte—Mr. Clarendon Whyte still received as a daily visitor, still installed in his post of laquais de place, as of old, in her sister's establishment.

"And where is the city heiress, then?" asked Katharine, the day after her arrival. "I had hoped Mr. Clarendon Whyte was married—gone and buried out of sight for ever—ages ago."

"The city heiress has proved faithless," answered Mrs. Dering, placidly, "if, indeed, she ever had any existence. I wrote you the tale as it was told to me;

and whether it was true, or only 'ben trovato,' Kate, we ought to be thankful for the effect it had on Dot. I was always afraid the poor little thing really liked Mr. Whyte in her heart."

"A pity she married Steven Lawrence if she did," said Katharine, bluntly. "No woman who had cared for Clarendon Whyte could love Steven, I am very certain."

"Love!" repeated Mrs. Dering, with the slightest possible sneer round the corners of her well-cut mouth. "My dear child, do you suppose for a moment Dora would have married any man for love? It would have been bad for Steven—are we all to call Mr. Lawrence 'Steven,' by the bye?—if she had. With a man like that it is far better that whatever attachment there is should be upon his side."

"I disagree with you entirely," cried Katharine. "Why do we ever speak on subjects like these? We don't understand each other; we talk in different languages! I think it is a shame, a degradation for Steven Lawrence, or for any man, to know that the woman who is to be at his side till one of them dies came there for any other reason than love!"

"Well, Kate," said Mrs. Dering, "when you speak in that sort of way you certainly do use a different language to mine, or to that of any other reasonable being. Look round the world and say if all the happiest marriages you see are not those which began without a pretence of sentiment on either side. Sentiment is a very pretty thing, dear, and becomes you admirably, but it won't wear—trust me! A sense of what is right and fitting; prudence, principle—above

all principle—these are the only foundations for solid happiness in marriage.”

“Principle, yes!” said Katharine drily; “but then, what do you mean by principle? Selfish interest, expediency, worldly advancement, or what?”

“By principle I mean *principle*,” answered Mrs. Dering. “Don’t let us attempt word-splitting on such a subject as this. You might almost as well ask me what I meant by right or wrong!”

But, unfortunately, just as Mrs. Dering had taken this lofty moral stand, the entrance of Mr. Clarendon Whyte put a stop to the conversation; and ten minutes afterwards Katharine left the house, as her habit was when he entered it, and went out with her small nieces and nephews to build castles on the beach.

She found the children’s society more welcome than any other during the whole of her visit to Brighton. Mrs. Dering, seeing with real concern that her sister was pale and spiritless, got up constant little impromptu dissipations for her amusement; and Katharine went bravely through them all. Dressed, and drove, and danced; yes, sometimes flirted even, as of old; then next morning, when she was with little Bell and Flossy on the beach, knew that these two hours of baby castle-building, and listening to baby tongues, were the only hours worth anything to her out of the twenty-four!

Until three months ago her affection for Mrs. Dering had been almost romantic in its girlish depth and warmth. She could see no fault in Arabella, could detect no leaven of worldliness in her character; could imagine no higher ideal to place before herself, when she should become Lord Petres’ wife, than her

sister. And now Mrs. Dering scarcely spoke without the sense, rather than the words, of what she said grating harshly on Katharine's heart! She recognised—taught by she knew not what new wisdom—the real nature of all which to her sister was happiness; saw, with newly-opened eyes, the true picture of a loveless mercenary marriage; and knew, with a shudder, that where Mrs. Dering found contentment, she, in the same place, would find despair. Successes in society; the admiration, the respect of the world; the companionship of empty-headed fools like Clarendon Whyte; these—with such well-regulated affection as she had for her children—filled up the cup of Arabella's prosperous life. With General Dering she had scarcely more human sympathy than she had with his plate-chest. "And if I was in such a position," Katharine would take a bitter pleasure in saying to herself, "If I was married to a man just not positively hateful to me, I would run away from him! I would commit some great wickedness, and bring his life and my own to a crash, and glory in doing so! But I would never live the mockery of a life Arabella does." And then, after thinking these desperate thoughts, she would steal away upstairs to the nursery, take her youngest niece upon her lap, and hold her face down on the soft little baby head with a wistful, yearning tenderness, the like of which not all her love for children had ever called forth in her heart till now.

"I have had my one chance of happiness in life," she would think an hour later, when she was dressing for a ride or dinner-party, and her mood had changed, "and let it go. No woman, I suppose, has that sort of love offered to her twice, and I must just take the

lot that I have chosen and make the best of it. Run away from Lord Petres when I'm married to him? bring things to a crash? What utter folly! I shall become like Arabella, of course, in time, and be happy with the measure of Arabella's happiness."

And in the meantime her spirits grew more fitful and her cheeks paler; and people began to say that the beautiful Miss Fane was losing her good looks, and must take care she did not play with Lord Petres too long if she wished to marry at all. These waxen complexions always went, alas! in a day when they did go. The Brighton doctor prescribed steel; the General pompously proposing an addition of cod-liver oil. Mrs. Dering despatched a letter bidding Lord Petres come over to England without delay. "My dear Kate is not positively ill," she wrote: "but I cannot say that I like her looks, and I am afraid she is a little depressed about herself. If you were to come, even for a day, suddenly, and without letting her know that I have written, I am sure that it would do her good."

Lord Petres had by this time returned to Paris, having gone through his usual autumnal course of mineral waters at the different baths; and three days after receiving Mrs. Dering's letter he travelled over dutifully from Calais to Dover, and from thence to Brighton. Brighton, I should say, was the one spot on the face of the globe which he detested most. The glare, the east winds, the nearness to the sea, the cookery to be met with at the hotels; everything in Brighton disagreed with Lord Petres to the very last degree: and it would be difficult to imagine any object more miserable and less lover-like than the poor

little fellow presented on the keen November afternoon when he drove up before Mrs. Dering's house on the East Cliff. An immense seal-skin wrapper entirely enveloped his small figure; a pair of seal-skin gloves were on his hands; the familiar half-shovel hat, without which Katharine had never seen him before, was replaced by a cloth travelling cap, the flaps of which were tied down closely round his melancholy white face.

He was ushered, still in his wraps, into the drawing-room where Katharine was alone at the piano, singing low to herself the same "Eurydice" in which Steven had interrupted her that morning at the Dene. "Lord Petres!" she cried, starting up, half inclined to laugh, half to cry in the surprise of seeing him. "Who in the world would have thought of seeing you? and in Brighton too!"

"I have taken every precaution," said Lord Petres; his slow solemn voice sounding more welcome, somehow, than it had ever done before to Katharine's ears. "And as I know that you are unprejudiced, Kate, I have ventured to present myself before you in my travelling-dress—armour, it may more justly be called, against the inclemency of the Brighton climate." Thus saying, Lord Petres took off his cap and gloves, and seated himself shivering before the fire. "If you will permit me," he remarked, after the usual kiss on the tips of Katharine's fingers, "I will, for the present, keep my great-coat on. I am obliged to observe the strictest care on account of the different mineral poisons which are at present in my system. You have not been to Vichy? My dear Katharine, the effects of the Vichy waters are admirable in themselves—Duclos

underwent a resurrection there—'tis the number of waters a man in my complicated state has to take after them that is the mischief. Vichy requires an after-course of Homburg, Homburg of Baden, Baden of Kissingen, and so on, until you become almost as much a walking pharmacopœia as if the physicians had had their way on you at home. Now tell me, perfectly frankly, how I look?"

How he looked? Any man but Lord Petres must have asked how *she* was; have noticed *her* pale cheeks; and Katharine felt grateful to her lover for his selfishness. Poor little Lord Petres! she did like him very dearly after all. Eccentric, selfish, hypochondriacal though he was, he was real; and reality, in the present sick state of Katharine's soul, seemed to her the very salt of earthly virtues. "I think you look decidedly better, Lord Petres. You have almost a colour."

"The east wind flushes me, Katharine. You could have mentioned no worse symptom than my apparent colour."

"Well, then, you are stouter. I am quite sure you are stouter."

"Thank you," said Lord Petres, with quiet resignation; "I wished to learn the truth, and I knew I should get it from your lips. The object of the whole of the waters I have swallowed has been to reduce what you call my stoutness. They have failed. Let us talk of other subjects."

Katharine took a chair beside him, and they talked, or rather Lord Petres talked, of Vichy and Baden, the last shape in bonnets, and the last subject that he had been studying for his great work on social reform; the accustomed kind of small-talk which, from the first

week of their engagement, had been the nearest approach ever made by Lord Petres to love-making. At last, Katharine as yet having borne little part beyond yes and no in the conversation:

"And so," remarked Lord Petres, with an amused little smile, "you did marry your cousin to the backwoodsman after all. Where are they? How are they getting on? On purely scientific grounds the future of those two singularly-mated persons will always be one worth watching."

"Steven Lawrence chose to propose to Dot, and Dot chose to accept him, as I told you in my letters," said Katharine, holding down her face. "I had nothing whatever to do with their engagement. They have returned to Ashcot. They spent their honeymoon in Paris, and, my cousin writes me word, enjoyed it wonderfully."

Lord Petres shook his head. "That theory about persons enjoying themselves wonderfully during honeymoons is one to which I have devoted a good deal of thought, and all my researches have irresistibly proved it to be fallacy. I speak of men, you understand: to a certain class of women," said Lord Petres, "no legitimate opportunity of wearing a new dress every day is devoid of interest. But men! Now, why should any man—we will take the backwoodsman for an example—enjoy that first enforced tête-à-tête with his wife which bears, ironically one would think, the name of honeymoon? On what experience, what established fact in human nature, is the supposition based?"

"I—I can quite believe that Dora wrote as she felt," said Katharine, evading any general question about married happiness. "To be in Paris at any

time, or under any circumstances, is Dot's ideal of human beatitude. Poor little thing! I really feel sorry when I think of her back in the country again."

"Sorry for her, or for her husband, or for both?"

Katharine did not answer, and Lord Petres looked attentively at her downcast face. "Ah," said he presently, "marriage, under the most favourable auspices, is a very hazardous undertaking, Kate."

"Very," said poor Katharine, with an attempt at a smile.

"A much more hazardous undertaking than you thought six months ago?"

"Yes," she answered, not knowing what was to come next.

"I can tell all this from your face. You have been thinking more since I saw you last than you ever did before in your life, and the result of your thoughts has been to take away your colour and your spirits. Now, viewing the subject quite dispassionately, *do* you wish that you were free again?"

She looked up at him with a start. "Free! Lord Petres, am I to think—am I to understand?" she faltered.

Little Lord Petres put one of his white hands on hers. "Katharine," he said, "from the first moment of our engagement I think we have spoken the truth to each other. We will do so still. I have not come to Brighton at this time of the year without a cause. Two or three days ago I got a letter from your sister, in which she told me that you were ill, and that letter brought me here."

The blood flamed over Katharine's face. "I wish Arabella would let us take care of our own affairs!"

she cried. "Should I not have told you myself if there had really been anything important enough to bring you here?"

"Well, Mrs. Dering seemed to think not," said Lord Petres, quietly; "and in all these matters Mrs. Dering, I am sure, knows best. You are looking ill, and, notwithstanding my own feeble state, it was right, no doubt, that I should come and see you. Now we will condense what is to follow. We won't have a long scene, like lovers on the stage. You are young, Katharine, and not in love with me; you have been telling yourself so often of late; and you care not one jot about my being pretty well off. Do you wish to have back your freedom?"

From the lips of any other man living Katharine Fane's proud spirit would have resented this question as the cruellest indignity: from Lord Petres she took it straight at it came from his heart: a heart which, however limited its compass, however encrusted with sybarite selfishness, was crystal to its very depths where honour and where integrity was concerned. During their whole engagement, this was the moment, perhaps, in which Katharine Fane went nearest to loving him!

"You—you have asked me this too suddenly!" she stammered.

"Then take time to give me your answer," said Lord Petres. "I shall leave Dover by the last mail to-night (for I am travelling, Duclos with me, as men travel in Spain, and descend at no hotels on the road), and shall expect your answer, not later than four days hence, in Paris: expect it a little anxiously, as you may know, Kate."

She looked round at him with great tears trembling

in her eyes. To lose the most trivial fealty that had once been hers was horribly bitter to Katharine Fane: to lose Lord Petres seemed the agony of death to her—now that Steven was lost too! “There is no affection for me in the world,” she cried. “You . . . I did think you would be faithful to me always, and you wish already to give me up!”

She drew her hand away from him, and her voice broke down.

“Oh, dear me, *please* don’t cry!” said Lord Petres, entreatingly, but turning away his head lest he should himself incur the risk of agitation. “I thought you did not care for me, Kate!—I thought it was only right I should give you a chance of escape; but *please* don’t cry!”

“And please don’t ever be so cruel to me again!” sobbed Katharine. “Not care for you, indeed! Ah, Lord Petres, what should I have left to care for if you were to forsake me now?”

. . . . “And so the scene does end like a scene on the stage!” said Lord Petres. “I suppose the playwrights know what they are about after all. Now, the next thing is, when are we to be married?”

“Oh, that is quite another question,” said Katharine, smiling, but with the big tears still on her cheeks. “Because I refuse, in spite of yourself, to give you your freedom, is no reason I wish you to be married at once.”

“At once would be impossible,” remarked Lord Petres, gravely, and coming back from the unaccustomed region of emotion and lovemaking to that of plain matter of fact. “I have just hired an apartment for the winter from some father or uncle of Duclos—

hired it at an extravagant price I know, from the way Duclos speaks of his relation's honour and principles; but I had a serious suspicion the rascal meant to leave me unless I obeyed him, and 'tis but another form of raising his wages. The apartment will suit me admirably for the present, but I need scarcely tell you, Kate, is only large enough for a bachelor establishment."

"So Tangiers will not see anything of us for this winter," said Katharine. "Do you remember poor papa's first and last attempt at social diplomacy? We decided, then, you know, that courtship was the brightest season of life, and that we would prolong the brightest season to the utmost. Let us be of the same mind still."

Lord Petres deliberated for a minute or two in silence. "Katharine," he said at last, "it is absurd to speak of courtship between persons who do not court, and absurder still to believe that any season of life can be bright to a man in my state of health. On referring to my diary this morning I found that we have been engaged exactly one year eleven months and twelve days. You have told me that you consider three years a fitting term for an engagement, and what I would propose is, that we should be married on the third anniversary of the day when—when the subject was originally mooted. This will be November the thirtieth. Now, have you any objection to be married on that day?"

"Not in the least. November the thirtieth seems to me as good a day as we can possibly fix," said Katharine, with a smile; the old feeling that they were two marionette lovers playing their little parts in a

marionette comedy coming back upon her in full force.

"Then we may look upon the matter as definitely settled," said Lord Petres, rising. "There could not be a more favourable time than the present for bringing the proposal before Duclos," he added. "The scoundrel has been in a better temper than I ever knew him since he drank the Vichy waters, and, considering the way his relations are robbing me, it is possible he may consent to stay for a year, at least, after my marriage. This I will let you know. To-day is the twelfth. It will probably take a week for Duclos to deliberate. Well, by the twenty-first then, I propose that I will let you know his ultimatum."

"And if—*if* it should be unfavourable?" asked Katharine, as Lord Petres raised her hand to his lips.

"Then I shall have exactly eleven months and nine days in which to look out for his successor," he answered, with extreme earnestness. "I believe—indeed Duclos himself says—there is one other artist, an Italian fellow, at present in Vienna, who might suit me, but 'tis doubtful whether a man in his position could enter upon a fresh post at so short a notice—more doubtful still whether I should live long in his hands. Katharine, God bless you! You will forgive me if I cover my head before opening the door?"

When Mrs. Dering came home at six o'clock from her ride, Katharine met her with the welcome intelligence that Lord Petres had been to pay them a visit, and that the wedding day was fixed. "It was very thoughtful of you to write to him, Bella," she

said, looking up from the place beside the fire where she had been sitting alone in the twilight. You see, Lord Petres told me all about it, and I am very glad that I have seen him. It really was time that a term should be fixed to his misery."

"And when is it to be, then?" cried Mrs. Dering, radiant, and throwing her arm round her sister's shoulder.

"On the thirtieth of November, rather more than a year hence," said Katharine, quietly. "Lord Petres himself fixed the day."

Mrs. Dering's face of horror and disappointment was a study. "You will play out this game of folly a little too long!" she cried, with more temper than it was her habit to show towards Katharine. "The thirtieth of *next* November! For my sake, please, never mention this ridiculous date to any one we know. If you don't intend to marry Lord Petres, Kate, and what has changed you so utterly of late I refrain even from guessing, it would be better for yourself to say so openly."

"Very likely it would," answered Katharine, with perfect humility; "indeed, I have been saying the same thing to myself for the last hour, ever since he went away. But there, Arabella, there is the sin of my character. I don't love Lord Petres, yet when he offered to set me free just now I felt that it would be pain greater than I could bear to give him up."

"He—offered—to set you—free!" exclaimed Mrs. Dering, repeating the words with a mechanical, frozen sort of horror.

"Yes, and if I had been true to him or to myself I would have taken the offer—honestly, generously as

he made it!" said Katharine, clasping her hands together in a sort of passion. "But I couldn't. I couldn't bear to lose him. I've never been able to give up any one just at the moment when it would be right and honourable to do so. I am like a miser, wanting to have all, but whose own barren heart can give nothing." She bowed her face down, and gazed with vacant tired expression into the fire.

"The real truth is, my dear Kate, that you want tone. Dr. Goodriche says so. Go and lie down now for half an hour—we have people coming to dinner, remember—and I will bring you a glass of sherry. You know what Dr. Goodriche said—"

"—About my taking a glass of sherry whenever I felt out of spirits!" interrupted Katharine. "I wonder how many dozen bottles I should drink a week if I followed his advice? What nonsense doctors are forced to talk sometimes! We might just as well have called in a carpenter because the piano was out of tune as have consulted poor Dr. Goodriche about me."

"And what *is* the matter with you, then?" said Mrs. Dering, with a desperate feeling that it might be as well to know as to guess the worst. "It would do you good to speak, Kate. I'm a great many years older than you, and I have learnt that there is a remedy for nearly every ill under the sun."

"I am out of tune!" said Katharine, wearily. "Everything (except Bell and Flossy's voices) is a discord to me. I wake every morning, and know that there's a world full of love and a world full of pain and tears around me, and that I am a puppet in the middle of it all. If I died to-morrow where would be the loss? 'Katharine Fane is dead,' some one would

say. 'Well, well, her good looks had begun to fade, poor thing!' And some one else perhaps, 'Ah, she was a woman who lived for her own vanity alone—a woman who never knew the meaning of the word love.' And by to-morrow he would have forgotten me."

"Who would have forgotten you, child?"

"Who? . . . Why, my imaginary mourner, of course!" cried Katharine, lifting up her face with a laugh. "My dear Bella, to think that you and I, of all people living, should surprise ourselves talking sentiment! I've been a little out of spirits, a little bored of late, and what I really do need is—what all spiritless, bored young women need, plenty of fresh air, and good, hard out-of-door exercise. Do men, when they happen to get hipped, want tonics, and sal volatile, and pity from their friends?" went on Katharine. "Of course not; because they don't sit over the fire, and think over their own mental symptoms; neither will I. You and the General have been very kind to me, but I believe hunting twice a week, and walking with papa through the turnip-fields on the remaining four, will be a better tonic for me than all Dr. Good-riche's skill and sherry. Don't think me ungrateful, Bella, but, if you please, I'll go back to Clithero to-morrow."

There was more colour on Katharine's face, more animation in her eyes that evening than there had been for weeks past.

"The fact is, Lord Petres was here to-day," Mrs. Dering whispers to her friends. "He came all the way from Paris, poor fellow, to pay us a morning visit, and I think—well I *think* I may say that the

time for my dear Kate's marriage is definitely fixed at last."

CHAPTER V.

Mrs. Lawrence at Home.

ONE of the monotonous afternoons, which were Mrs. Lawrence's daily portion, had set in; Steven away at his work; the kitchen clock sending its heavy tick-tack, tick-tack, through the silent house, when Barbara threw open the parlour-door, her eyes cast up to the ceiling, an air of stolid protestation written upon her whole face, as the old servant's manner was when ushering in any of "Mrs. Steven's" morning callers.

Steven's proposed amendment of having a girl from the village to wait upon his wife had been rejected by old Barbara with mingled scorn and ridicule. As long as she lived in Ashcot there should be neither girl nor woman wasting and breaking about her kitchen. She had done the housework and the washing, the baking and the boiling when there were five souls ("and four out of them *full-grown*," said Barbara, with incidental irony) to wait upon. If a train of servants was wanted to serve Steven and his wife now, the master could suit himself when he chose. And not only did Barbara refuse foreign help—foreign customs, "the common decencies of life," according to Dot, neither anger nor softness on the part of her new mistress would bring her to accept. "You must put down your sleeves, and tie on another apron always, will you remember?" Mrs. Lawrence had said when, on the great occasion of Lady Haverstock's visit, Barbara, busy with her bread, had unceremoniously walked in before her lady-

ship, her cotton sleeves pinned up above her elbows, her clean strong old arms thick in flour. "Open the door wide, not with a push, as you always do, and say the visitor's name distinctly and respectfully." Of all which undeniably good advice Barbara had taken precisely as much notice as of the first Napoleonic order about raised pies and fires in October. In former days when visitors called upon Steven's grandmother, or later on, upon the first Mrs. Steven, no such fal-lals as announcing names were wanted. The mistress was sure to be busy in her kitchen or dairy, and, if the visitors were of sufficient importance to be shown into the unoccupied parlour, would go in there herself—after a lapse of five or ten minutes' dressing—to receive them. Barbara had no notion of calling out folks' names, as if they were being asked in the parish church, to suit Mrs. Steven's foreign fancies. If they knew each other already, where was the good of it? If they didn't know each other, what did they come for? This kind of philosophy was so unanswerable that Dot, in despair, had ceased to argue further. Sullenly she began to acknowledge that there were a great many things she would have to accept simply under the guise in which Barbara chose to present them to her—visitors among the rest. As long as she lived she would probably never see morning callers ushered into her presence otherwise than by the push of a parlour-door; an old farm servant, her arms thick in flour or other discreditable compound, marching in, with tight lips, and a face set and hard as fate, straight before them.

On the present occasion Dora had expected to see no one more interesting than homely Mrs. Lyte, or perhaps the doctor's wife, who had not yet paid her

wedding visit; and at sight of Katharine she almost jumped up in the air with joy. Here, at last, was a human creature in a well-cut skirt and jacket, with the last shape of hat on its head; a human creature fresh from the land of millinery and of the living.

"Kate—dear Kate! I didn't expect you for a fortnight. How well you look—no you don't, you are thin and pale, but how well your dress suits you! Silk serge, isn't it? You may shut the door, if you please;" this to Barbara, who, with coldly curious eyes, had stood to watch the cousins' embrace. "Horrid old creature, did she think we wanted her to stop and hear all we've got to say? Oh, Kate, my dear, if you knew what I have to go through with that woman; until I came I do believe Steven and she dined together in the kitchen—take off your hat . . . it's pretty, but not in the least like what they wear in Paris. When did you come? How do I look? Do you like the new way I do my hair?"

"It changes you a good deal," said Katharine, with a slight tremble in her voice. "But I suppose people ought to look changed after they are married. I dare-say it would have startled me more to find you looking like Dora Fane still."

Dora gave a profound sigh. "I don't feel like Dora Fane, I'm sure," she said, with a shake of the head. "Sit here, Kate. I can't call it an easy chair, but alas! it is the easiest the house possesses. Is Brighton full? Is it true the English are beginning to take to large bonnets again! If they are, they make a fatal mistake. Pieffort, herself, told me nothing larger than that," Dot held up her own diminutive hand, "will be worn this winter. But *is* it true?"

The subject of dress lasted at least a quarter of an hour; the bride insisting upon comparing notes, item by item, as to the respective fashions of Brighton and Paris, and this quarter of an hour gave Katharine time to shake off the first repugnance—I will make the confession for her boldly!—that she had felt on seeing Dora in Steven's house as Steven's wife.

"I was tired of Brighton," she said, when the subject of silks and serges exhausted, Dora at last began to question her about herself and the cause of her own pale cheeks. "The driving and walking on the cliff, the dressing and parading, and never being able to get away from people, from morning till night, is, to my mind, just the most monotonous life any man or woman could live. There is a hundred times more real excitement in the country than in town, if one knows where to look for it."

"If one does!" said Dot. "Kate, my dear, will you be kind enough to look round this room, and tell me the possible excitement to be derived from a life like mine? You hear that sound? tack, tack, tack, like some one driving nails into a coffin, well, that is the kitchen-clock, and that, with the sea moaning and roaring, or the rain pattering on the window, is what I have to listen to from the time I get up in the morning until I go to bed at night. Now look through the window. I declare," cried Dot, "Aunt Arabella was right! If I had gone into another county it would have been something—a change, at least. Here, there's no change at all, except that I look across from Ashcot to the Dene, instead of from the Dene to Ashcot. Excitement! I should like you to spend a week precisely

in my place, and see if you would ever talk about excitement in the country again."

"I never could spend a week precisely in your place," said Katharine, a sudden flush of colour spreading over her pale face. "If I lived—lived on a farm like this, I know that I could make myself happy, because I would spend the whole of my life out of doors. When I am married," went on Katharine, resolutely, "I mean, if I have any influence at all with Lord Petres, to be as much at Eccleston, and as little in London, as possible."

"And drive, and ride, and play at model farming, and superintend the restoration of your old chapel, and convert the poor, and keep a French cook, and have a house constantly full of people, when you don't go away to London or Paris? Ah! I should like that kind of country life, extremely, myself. But Lord Petres and Steven possess, you must remember, rather different incomes."

"I don't think money need make much difference in one's real enjoyment of life," said Katharine, "above all, of country life. But from what you tell me, you never stir out of doors, Dot. You condemn yourself to be miserable! Why don't you ride? Uncle Frank says that Mr. Law . . . your husband," she brought the word out with an effort, "has two of the best horses in the neighbourhood. Try to hunt a bit this winter or ride at least to see the meets, and if you are not strong enough to get about the farm on foot, buy a shooting-pony to carry you."

"Not I," said Dot. "I hate ponies—besides, what do I want to see on the farm? and I haven't the courage to hunt, even if it would divert me, which it

would not. I have no spirits left, that's the truth. I don't believe the place agrees with me. Look at the paper above your head—mildew! and my bedroom is mildewed, and the whole house in mildewed! I've been hoarse ever since the day I came home." And Dot coughed dismally.

"And how did Paris amuse you?" asked Katharine with a genuine feeling of pity—for Steven—rising in her heart. "I hoped, from your letters, you were perfectly contented there."

"Paris," answered Dot, "was, as Paris always must be to me, delightful, even though I saw it under disadvantages. There's no doubt about it, Kate, Englishmen (and Steven, in spite of all his travels, is an Englishman, heart and soul) don't know how to enjoy Paris a bit."

"Don't they, indeed?" said Katharine, shortly.

"Not a bit! Just figure to yourself the first day or two we spent there!" Dot's face began to grow animated. "We went, of course, to some great expensive hotel, Rue de Rivoli, recommended by Bradshaw. Solemn dinner, surrounded by silent English people at six, breakfast by ourselves, at a huge table, with a hundred and fifty empty cups and saucers ranged round it in the morning, then off, arm in arm, to see pictures and churches, as set forth by Galignani, and back again to solemn dinner and silent English people at six. *Dieu des dieux!*" cried Dot, falling back unconsciously upon one of the familiar profanities of her childhood, "what a Paris! A couple of dull rooms, looking into a court yard, a dull table-d'hôte dinner, and sight-seeing every day, tête-à-tête with poor Steven! Well, the third day was Sunday, and after a good deal of trouble I got

him off to the Bois. It was a bright day, and there were bands playing everywhere, and numbers of toilettes to be seen. My own was pretty, Kate, that pale grey silk—you remember—corded, and trimmed with groseille, white bonnet, with little groseille feather. I saw that I was regarded as I walked, and felt happy—felt in Paris, for the first time! I told him so, speaking cheerfully, I suppose, as I felt. ‘Dora,’ said he, ‘in the middle of the prairies or of the forest I never felt so utterly alone as I do at this moment.’ Did you ever hear such an answer? Was it chilling, say, at the first moment since our marriage that I had had a distraction?”

“I believe I can understand the feeling,” said Katharine; but she looked straight into the fire, not at Dora. “Among the crowds of people on the Brighton cliff, I believe I have often thought the same thing myself.”

“Well,” said Dora, “I, for my part, am very commonplace and matter-of-fact. When I am alone I feel lonely, and when I am in a crowd—yes, without a soul to speak to—I feel I have a society. Don’t think in all this, Kate, that I am saying one word against my dear Steven. He is an excellent creature, good and kind to me as he can be, only—about sixty or seventy years behind the rest of the world! Now I asked him once to take me to Mabilie (and all the world knows it is *en règle* to go there incognito, and with one’s husband), and, unlike Uncle Frank, of old, he consented, not, in reality, knowing any difference between Mabilie and the Morgue. Well, we had scarcely entered, were just beginning to look on at the first steps of a quadrille, when he turned with a face of

horror, and bore me off like a whirlwind out of the place. 'My poor little Dora! forgive me for taking you there,' he said; 'I took you, as you wished to go, in ignorance.' And he continued to talk about his own stupidity, and to ask my forgiveness; till I was sick to death of the very name of Mabile."

"And I like him—I admire him for it," said Katharine, looking up, with her cheeks aflush. "I don't know what sort of place Mabile is, but I admire Steven for these old-fashioned, simple ideas he has about what women ought or ought not to do. If a man of the world held them, one might think they savoured of hypocrisy or affectation: from him they are real. Try to understand him, Dot," went on poor Katharine, warming; "try to appreciate the really noble parts of his character. He showed his . . . his love for you in this very care, this very delicacy, as to where he took you."

For a minute or two Dot looked thoughtful. "Kate," she said, at last, "you call Steven, 'simple;' so, as regards his knowledge of the world, do I; and yet, will you believe me when I say that I don't understand his character one bit? I think sometimes of all the men I have known—men even like George Gordon, whom I detest, or Lord Petres, who has never a word to say to me—and I feel that if I had married any one of them I should have had more in common with my husband—have understood him better than I do Steven. Now can you understand what I mean when I say that I never for one hour together feel sure of him?"

"I cannot, indeed," answered Katharine. "I should have said Steven Lawrence was a man of whom one might feel surer than of any other."

"Well, *I* don't," said Dot, "and, what is more, I doubt if I ever shall. From the hour of our marriage he has been perfectly kind to me, in his forced, absent way (a dozen times a day, at first, he used to call me 'Miss Dora!'). He hardly ever left my side in Paris. In every way that he could, he used to try to please me. All this I felt fully; and yet often—often, when he has been standing looking out at the window of the hotel, and I have watched his moody face, I have thought if he was *once* to break away, he was a man to go and lose every shilling he possessed at play, or get into a quarrel and kill some one—in short, commit any act of folly or desperation you like. You will call it a silly fancy; but if I was to wake some fine morning now, and find that he had gone straight back to America, and left me and the farm for ever, I should not be surprised. A feeling I can't give a reason for," cried Dot, "tells me his life isn't enough for him; that Ashcot, though he's never idle for a moment, suits him as little as it does me, and that his perfect good temper, when I complain about Barbara, or anything, arises less from contentment than from half-sullen, half-indifferent patience. In short, I don't understand him. We live under one small roof, but in different worlds. Voilà!"

The subject was dismissed, and Dot got out her embroidery, and talked of the elaborate capes and dresses she meant to work, trusting Providence might send her the chance to wear them, next summer; and of Barbara's shortcomings; and the horrors of Shiloh; and the visitors who had called and who had not called—the interests, such as they were, of her small world. And on and on as she talked, one image was

ever present to Katharine—the image that Dot, in her unconsciousness, had made so clear of Steven's paralysed life—the moody-faced man turning round from weary gazing through the hotel window to call his wife "Miss Dora;" the man with every strong capacity for good or for evil, for keenest pleasure or keenest pain, forcing himself by work into a kind of lethargic patience; kind to the poor unsympathetic little creature who had married him, yet, under one small roof, each living in their own widely-separated world! Katharine saw it all—all the first act in this mockery of a marriage, which her vanity, her cowardice, had been the means of bringing about.

At five o'clock, to a moment, Barbara entered with the tea-things. "I did not ring," said Dot, looking up from the table, all strewn over and heaped up with embroidery and laces.

Barbara stood erect and silent—a rational being, performing her duty of bringing in the master's tea, but having no concern whatever with these two fine wax-dolls and their tableful of gewgaws and vanities. As she stood so, and while Dot pettishly found herself constrained with her own hands to make room for the tea-tray, Katharine, from her corner by the fireside, watched the old servant's face. It was a fine strong face, she thought. In spite of its present acid expression there was plenty of good human kindness about the firm old mouth and keen, deep-set grey eyes. "If I had been Dot, I would have made Barbara like me in three days," she thought. "If—ah, if Dot loved Steven, this woman could not keep from liking her for his sake!" And just then Barbara turned, and fastened on her a look so piercing, so bitter-full of contempt, of

passionate resentment—that Katharine's eyes sank abashed to the floor. In that moment it seemed to her that another human soul beside her own knew her secret, and despised her.

Tea at Ashcot was not a flimsy pretence, like the five o'clock tea of London ladies, but a meal; one of the four good hearty wholesome meals of the day. "We dine at other peoples' breakfast hour," said Dot, when Barbara had left the room, as if to apologise for the substantial plate of bread-and-butter, the seed-cake, the preserves, which the old servant had set out; "and as the solemnity they call supper does not occur till half-past nine, one really wants something now, and dear Steven *has* such an appetite!"

As Mrs. Lawrence spoke, a step—the lithe quick step Katharine knew so well—sounded on the gravel path outside the window. A minute later Dot ran forward, as the parlour-door opened, and Steven, who coming in from the dusk to candle-light could discern no object in the room, took his wife in his arms and kissed her.

"My dear Steven!" cried Dot, half-pretending to push him away, "don't you see we have a visitor? Here's Katharine come back."

Miss Fane rose from her chair, and came forward smiling. The sight of that little affectionate demonstration had furnished her for the moment, she felt, with abundant self-possession. "How do you do, Steven?—you will let me call you by your name now? you did not expect to see me sitting by your fireside, did you?"

She held out her hand to him, chill as it had been at the instant they said good-bye on his marriage-day;

and Steven held it—coldly at first; then, as his eyes grew accustomed to her face, with sudden, eager, clasp in his. “Why, you have been ill!” he said, as unconscious of Dora’s presence as if she had belonged to another planet. “You are ill now—and I never heard of it.”

There was such deep, such genuine, concern in his voice as he said this, that even Dot, the least sensitive, the least jealous of wives, could not help noticing it. “That is what I call a really cheerful greeting!” she cried. “Steven never takes a roundabout road in anything, I must tell you, Kate. If he thinks you look ill, he says so, as you perceive.”

“Steven is quite right,” said Katharine, drawing back her hand and coming over to Mrs. Lawrence’s side. “And, unless I mistake, Dot, you told me the same thing. I *am* ill—I mean I have been ill—I mean I don’t think Brighton agreed with me.”

Steven turned round sharply; walked away, his hands thrust into his pockets, to the window, and stood there gazing out, without speaking a word, at the darkness.

“That is his way,” whispered Dot, getting on tip-toes to reach Katharine’s ear. “Just as I told you he used to stand and stare out into the court-yard in Paris. Steven, my dear;” after a minute or two; “when you have quite done looking at nothing, perhaps you will be good enough to come to tea; Kate and I are waiting for you patiently.”

He came obediently, and placed himself at his wife’s side; Katharine at the other side of the table; and then Dot, who seemed in her old high spirits this

evening, began to pour out tea and talk for everybody.

"It was so good of you to come to us the first day of your return, Kate. Aunt Arabella will be jealous. Of course you don't mean to return till late?"

Katharine answered that she must be home at a little past six. Mr. Hilliard was to call for her at half-past five at latest, and she was afraid it was that already. "I am sure I hope papa won't forget all about me," she added. "Poor mamma will never forgive my being absent from dinner to-day."

"Oh, if Uncle Frank doesn't come, and you really must go, Steven will walk with you," said Dot. "Won't you, Steven, when tea is over?"

"No, indeed," cried Katharine, before he could answer, "I would not think of taking Mr. Law—of taking Steven out. If papa does not come I shall just wait patiently till they send for me. You need not be in such a hurry to get rid of me, Dot."

She laughed a little as she said this; and Steven looked steadily at her once more. The laugh, that had once been so pleasant to listen to in its rippling, girlish frankness, seemed to have lost more of its youth than even her face had lost. What was amiss with her? Was her engagement going wrong? Had she failed in subjugating a sufficient number of slaves of late? or—but he hated himself for the thought—was she acting a part with him still?

"If his spirit has suffered it has not affected him much outwardly!" thought Katharine, taking a glance at Steven's bronzed, healthy face, then at the great slice of brown bread and marmalade on his plate. "It's

easy enough in poetry or novels to depict blighted heroes of six feet one, but when one comes to see them near, the picture loses its pathos!"

With so much justice do men and women judge each other in the supreme moments of their lives.

The conversation flagged somewhat at first, not because Dot was at a loss for words, but because Katharine shrank in Steven's presence from discussing satin-stitch and fashions still. At length it came round to Brighton, and Dora began to ask about the people who were spending the season there. Katharine ran through a string of names, glad to have found so thoroughly neutral a subject; finally, forgetting what she was about, spoke of Mr. Clarendon Whyte. In a moment Dot's colour changed. "Was—was his wife with him?" she asked, in a low voice, and becoming intently occupied with her tea-cup.

"His wife? oh, that was all a false report," said Katharine. "Arabella told us what she had heard, but there was not, it seems, a word of real truth in it. At all events Mr. Clarendon Whyte seems to me just as far from being married, or thinking of any one but himself, as ever."

A curious look came across Dora Lawrence's face. "And did you, or rather did Mrs. Dering, see as much of Mr. Whyte as you used in town?" she asked.

"I believe he used to come to the house a good deal," answered Katharine; "but I saw very little of him. You know of old how much Mr. Whyte and I cared for each other."

"He is still *laquais de place*, in short, Kate?"

"Still *laquais de place*," said Katharine. "With this difference, that the General now accepts his atten-

tions. It is a great sight to see poor Mr. Whyte's face when he is left alone with General Dering after dinner."

"If the wine is good, Clarendon Whyte would be contented," remarked Dot, with a little curl of the lip. "The labourer is worthy of his hire. Steven, dearest, cut me a slice of bread-and-butter."

Much to Katharine's relief, her stepfather made his appearance shortly after six o'clock. Mr. Hilliard, who never saw a yard farther in the spirit than his eyes showed him materially, came into the parlour, his kind face beaming with smiles. Just at first, when Dora and her husband returned home, he had, it must be confessed, not felt quite sure as to the degree of intimacy that ought to exist between the inmates of Ashcot and of the Dene. Classes were classes; and whatever one's personal feelings might be, there *were* distinctions it was a duty to keep up. But this small leaven of traditional dignity (due in the first instance to his wife's suggestions, rather than to impulse of his own) had vanished before the daily-increasing liking which the honest-hearted little Squire was beginning to feel for Steven. The lad, whatever his birth, had the feelings of a gentleman; was making Dot a good husband, looking after his farm as he ought, draining his clay-lands on his, the Squire's, own system; and now, here was Katharine capital friends with them both! What should Mr. Hilliard know of the vain repentance, the vain passion, the bitter discontent underlying the outward varnish of this pleasant little picture of domestic peaceful happiness?

"We shall see more of you now, Mrs. Dora, I hope," he said, patting Mrs. Lawrence's small shoulder as they

were leaving, "Mind, you must consider the Dene just as much your home as ever; and you too, Lawrence. Come to us as you used in the days when you and Dot had not begun to quarrel."

Katharine turned away her head. Dora, not in the slightest degree discountenanced, began to laugh. "We never quarrel now, do we, Steven? and we shall always, always be glad to come to the Dene, Uncle Frank. I haven't seen Aunt Arabella for an age."

"Well, then, come and see her to-morrow; and by the bye, Lawrence," added the Squire, turning to Steven, "if you have nothing particular to do, I wish you would run over in the morning and try this new Irish horse of mine. Kate is bent on riding him to the meet next Wednesday, and I should be glad to see you put him at a fence or two first. You can come over any time of the day you like, Dora my dear, and stop to dinner, both of you."

Dot accepted without giving Steven time to speak; and almost before Mr. Hilliard and Katharine had left the house, was busying herself in thinking over her apparel for the next day. The audience would be a limited one; still, dining at the Dene was "going out" now; and Dora had long ago decided that if she waited for suitable occasions on which to wear her different Parisian clothes she would lie (in the last unalterable toilette) in Clithero churchyard before most of them were worn at all.

"And does not Kate look ill, Steven?" she cried, running out to her husband as he stood, lighting his pipe, in the porch. "I never thought she would lose her looks so soon. Her wedding-day is fixed at last, you know, and Katharine says she is determined to be

married in a bonnet, and have no party at all. Did you ever hear of such a thing?"

Steven was silent; his wife's remarks seldom seemed to him to require any specific answer; besides, he really was occupied at this moment in getting his meerschaum to light; a much graver interest, to a man of sense, than hearing about young ladies' love-affairs or wedding-dresses.

"It seems quite good to have Kate back," went on Dot. "There will be some one to speak to, some one to take pity on us a little of an evening now. Oh dear, out again?" This as Steven went inside the passage, and took up his hat. "Now what *can* there be for you to do at this time of night!"

"There are the horses to look to, and the cows to fodder," Steven answered. "Both the lads have got a holiday to-night."

"As usual," said his wife; "I believe you give them holidays so often simply that you may have more work to do yourself! How long will you be, then?" Mrs. Lawrence felt that it would be better to chatter, even to a silent husband, than be left alone with her own reflections, her own restless dissatisfied heart to-night.

"I shall be back in half an hour, my love," said Steven, stopping and pressing his lips on her forehead with the cold gentleness which already had become a habit (in love nothing is habitual) to him. "Just as long as it will take me to finish my pipe."

Dora looked after her husband as far as she could discern his figure through the darkness, and remarked that when he had gone about a dozen yards from the house he turned away towards the sea-walk, not the

stables. From the parlour-window, long afterwards, she could see the red glow of Steven's pipe moving to and fro, to and fro—"like the unquiet ghost that he is!" thought Dot—along the same twenty or thirty paces of the path. And an expression the reverse of tender rose into Mrs. Lawrence's eyes as she stood and watched there.

"Dot and her husband seem to get on together admirably," said Mr. Hilliard, as he was trotting home in excellent spirits, and with an excellent appetite for his dinner, at Katharine's side. "Admirably. You may take some credit to yourself for your success in match-making, after all, Kate!"

CHAPTER VI.

Within and Without.

"LOVE, they say, cannot exist without jealousy. Can jealousy exist, I wonder, without love?" This Dora Lawrence asked herself one drizzling December evening as she stood by the parlour-window of Ashcot playing dreary tunes, her usual occupation, on the glass, and looking out across the wet leafless garden for Steven's return from hunting.

Can jealousy exist without love? Dora's was not a mind given in a general way to the solution of nice psychological difficulties, but this question was one which during the past fortnight—the fortnight that had elapsed since Katharine's return—she had put to herself pretty frequently. "The fact is, I suppose, there are different sorts of jealousy," she went on in her thoughts, after crossing to stir the fire and look at herself in the unflattering dull old glass over the mantel-

shelf; then returning more drearily than before to her watch beside the window; "and what I feel is a remote variety, not following the ordinary laws of the species. A woman who was jealous in the good orthodox fashion would be jealous under any circumstances. I should not. If I had amusements, if I had friends, I should be grateful to any one who would keep Steven away five or six hours a day, and then send him back in a better temper in the evening! I'm jealous—if it is jealousy—just because I hate other people to be amused and me not, La—la! am I bad?—am I wicked at heart? Is it much to want my little bit of distraction, my little bit of pleasure, when all the rest of the world are amusing themselves without me?" And as Dot leaned her head against the window, heavy tears—for she was not en toilette, had no complexion this afternoon—began to roll slowly down her miserable face.

Five o'clock came, but no Steven; and about ten minutes after the usual time old Barbara, unbidden, brought in candles and tea. Dot was seated by the fire now; her little figure curled up in the solitary arm-chair the room possessed—a huge structure, affording no available rest either for the back or head—with her face buried down in her hands. She started up, white as a ghost, and with her dark eyes looking darker and bigger than usual, at the old servant's entrance. "There's no good bringing tea yet. Your master is out. You know very well I wouldn't begin without him."

Barbara set down the candles and the tea-tray, stood for a minute erect and silent, then cleared her throat twice, thrice, and came over the room to Dora's side. "My dear," she said, "don't 'ee fret! Steven didn't

ought to leave you as he does, and I mean to tell him so. I've baked you some hot cakes such as you like, and done you a bit of ham on the grill, and do'ee set up and make a good tea. There was never a man yet brought home quicker by his wife's keeping an empty stomach and worriting after him."

If the kitchen clock had suddenly broken out into words of human sympathy Dot could scarcely have been more taken aback than by the sound of Barbara's voice speaking to *her* in kindness. What should she know of that old heart's passionate love and passionate jealousy? How guess that in pitying her, Steven's neglected wife, Barbara was but joining issue against the woman whom she looked upon as the common enemy of both—Katharine Fane?

"I am sure I don't feel as if I could eat," she cried, with a gulp; but at that moment the odours of hot cakes and broiled ham came in from the kitchen, and she got down out of her chair. "This damp weather makes me hoarser than ever, and—and my head aches. I don't think I shall ever know what it is to feel well again!"

She did in truth look desperately ill at this moment, as many women, whose beauty depends upon art do when art chances to be laid aside. Barbara looked at her long and steadily. "Mrs. Steven," said she, "when I first heard of Steven's marrying—yes, and when I first seen you here, and no more suited to farm ways than I should be to sit up on a sofy alongside the Squire's lady—my heart was set——"

"—Set against me!" cried Dora, as she hesitated. "I am sure you needn't mind speaking the truth. I

am getting to see pretty well how much everybody at Ashcot cares for me!"

"Well, I knew that my poor boy had done a foolish thing by marrying out of his class and out of his religion—there's the truth—and I showed it——"

"—You did!" cried Dora.

"And now—now, Mrs. Steven," went on Barbara, with a quiver of the lip, "I say wherever the fault was before marriage the fault of your unhappiness as a wife will lie at Steven's door! What business has he riding here and there, to hounds one day, coursing the next—at the side of those who should blush to see him there—and you, not married two months, alone fretting by yourself? In our class of life we've no soft words for those who come between man and wife; but the gentry's ways—the gentry's ways," said Barbara, with rising passion, "are different to ours in most things, as the Lawrences have found to their cost before this!"

Mrs. Lawrence bit her lip, and looked steadily down at the faded pattern of the carpet. The surface comedy, not the hidden pathos, of every situation of human life, was always what really impressed Dot vividly; and she had all the trouble in the world not to laugh at this moment. She, Dora Fane, listening to virtuous homilies from old Barbara! Dora Fane pitied as a wife whose heart was breaking over a faithless husband's neglect! Mechanically Mrs. Lawrence passed her fingers down over her pocket to make sure that two letters which had reached her by the morning's post were lying safe there.

"I couldn't hear a word against Steven, and I don't know who the 'other person' is you speak of. He rode

to the meet with the Squire and Miss Fane to-day. Of course if I was strong I would like to ride too, but I'm not strong, and—and I could never wish Steven to be in better company than my Uncle Frank and my dear Cousin Katharine."

She said this with as pretty an air of self-sacrifice as can be imagined, and Barbara's stern heart softened more and more. "You'll never be strong," she said, "as long as you mope in doors by yourself, and don't breathe the air from one week's end to another; and so I'll tell Steven to-night. Why don't he set up a pony-shay, and drive you about a bit, as his Uncle Joshua used *his* wife?" cried Barbara, forgetting, probably, the unending source of strife which that very "pony-shay" had been between herself and Mrs. Joshua.

"Oh, I'm sure I don't want any fresh expense incurred for me," said Dot, modestly. "Perhaps if we had a pony carriage it would bore Steven to have to drive me in it. What would do me good I think, and not cost much," she gave a quick look at Barbara's face, "would be a little change—that is, I mean if Steven thought it right to leave the farm."

"It would be hard to say what Steven does think right now," said Barbara, with a solemn shake of the head, as she walked off out of the parlour. "But he shall hear my mind—he shall hear my mind!" This Dora overheard as the old woman's firm heavy step went down the passage. "Those whom God hath put together . . ." here the welcome sound of crackling fat told Dora the ham was coming off the fire, and the rest of the quotation was lost—"and not all the gentry

in England shall hinder me from telling Steven what I think of him, ay—and of her too.”

A minute later the hot scones and ham, with extra good tea and extra thick cream, were set upon the table; and poor Mrs. Lawrence, considering the state of her delicate throat and of her wounded affections, managed to make a really admirable high-tea. “I tried so hard to eat,” she said, when Barbara took away the empty plates. “Mr. Lawrence may not be home for hours, and I don’t want him to find me more faint and wearied than I can help when he does come.”

While these things went on in his household, Steven was riding slowly home through the lanes at Miss Fane’s side. I have said that it was a raw December evening. The sky was overcast; the air charged with moisture; the roads were ankle-deep in mud; the bare trees dripping and forlorn. But a raw December evening, like most other things or seasons, takes its colouring mainly from the prism through which human eyes view it. To Dot alone at the farm-house window, with her own thoughts (and a new-gotten letter worse than her thoughts) for companionship, no sky had ever been so black, no world so unutterably, hopelessly full of gloom as the sky and world she looked at to-day. To Steven, after a first-rate run, with the glow of animal health and spirits in his veins, with Katharine’s face beside him in the twilight, the world for this short half-hour was well-nigh as bright a world again as it had been under the sunshine of June. What had he to do with Miss Fane now? What hope could stir in his heart at being near Lord Petres’ future wife—his own waiting for him with poor childish babble, with unsympathetic voice, at the fireside at home? What

did Miss Fane feel for him, but pitying toleration as her cousin's husband? What but madness could make him haunt her as he did, mindless of all past misery she had wrought him; rewarded for twenty-four hours by the touch of her friendly hand, the "goodmorning" of her friendly voice? Well, Steven Lawrence *was* mad: loved Katharine Fane still, you see; there is the answer.

He had to ride back with her to the Dene this evening, for the Squire's horse had fallen lame early in the run, and out of the dozen men who volunteered to see her home Miss Fane, naturally, had chosen her Cousin Steven, so she called him, for an escort. Scarcely twenty sentences: none for very certain that would bear recording: passed between them as they rode along. No man living was more profoundly ignorant than Steven of the art of conversation. Unless he spoke the truth—which, while he lived, he must never speak to Katharine Fane—he held his peace. But there is the silence that comes from having nothing to say; the silence that comes from having too much; and perhaps this last is as eloquent as any speech we know of. To Katharine, at all events, those rutty lanes, that long expanse of common leading from Stourmouth to Clithero, had never seemed so short as to-night. She had got back much of her bodily strength during the last fortnight, which showed that her own system of tonics was a good one; that Brighton life, and want of exercise, and thinking of herself and her own troubles, had been mostly to blame for her white cheeks. And as for spirits—well, throughout all this portion of her life, Katharine Fane never gave herself time to think whether her spirits were good or

bad. She got up the second that her eyes were open in the morning; went with a sort of feverish zeal through her usual duties at the school-house and in the parish; walked, rode, dutifully visited poor little Dot at Ashcot; saw Steven Lawrence on the kind of terms she would have done had he been her brother; and when night came was sure of sleep through sheer bodily fatigue. "Are you trying to kill yourself, Kate?" her mother asked her more than once when, in spite of rain and wind and early snow, Katharine would appear of a morning in her habit and hat as usual. And, "not myself, mamma," was Katharine's answer. "I am not trying to kill myself, but a moping laziness which took possession of me awhile since, and which I am determined shall die. Leave me alone, mamma dear. When my enemy is dead and buried I'll stop quietly at home, and do worsted work, and sing songs, and be like other people again."

Well, to-night the enemy was slain, or so she began to think. The horrible distaste for life which used to overcome her in Brighton was gone: so much at least was clear. She was living on terms of good-will with Steven, meeting him daily; wishing, God knows, to see him happy in his home, and to be his friend and Dora's! And the wintry smell from the purple-brown fields had never seemed so fresh to her, or the way home, through the ratty lanes or across Stourmouth Common, so short. Yes—the enemy was slain! A pure new affection, such as she might have felt if heaven had given her a brother, had replaced the feeling which died—which should have died—on Steven's wedding-day; and Steven . . . oh, Steven was happy enough; no doubt of that! Were men like women in

their capacity for remembering? Her imagination had led her astray just at first about his life being "paralysed." His farm and his horses and his gun filled Steven's heart, and it was well so. The enemy was slain; the requiem chaunted; and both had come back to the prosaic well-beaten road of life along which men and women do walk contentedly when the first summer days are past; the first roses, with their blossoms and their thorns, plucked and dead.

They rode silently up the avenue to the Dene, and into the stable-yard. The head-groom was away: only one of the stable lads and Katharine's great setter pup came out in the darkness to meet them: and for the first time it fell to Steven to help Miss Fane to dismount.

"Oh, thanks; I can jump down very well by myself," cried Katharine, as he came up to her side. "I am quite accustomed to mount and dismount alone." Saying this, she disengaged her foot from the stirrup, gathered her habit together in her hand, then, either from the horse swerving, or from the puppy springing up to greet her, or both, missed her balance and, but for Steven, would have fallen heavily to the ground.

He caught her; he held her up in his arms—one second; not longer than a groom would have held his mistress if he had saved her from falling. But in that second Katharine Fane knew that the enemy who was slain, over whose grave the requiem was chaunted, had come back to life.

With a hurried "Good-night!" a hurried shake of the hand, she ran past him into the house; and Steven, after lingering to see a light shine from an upper

window that he knew, rode away home to Ashcot, and to his wife.

Old Barbara met him at the kitchen door. He was splashed from head to foot; his handsome face glowed with health, and something more than health; and he was whistling. "Yes," thought Barbara, "a man leading such a life as his *whistling!*" The old woman's face was solemn as a churchyard slab. She raised up a candle, and surveyed him up and down with cold scrutiny. "You are here at last, then," she said.

"Yes," said Steven, with perfect good humour. "I am here—not killed this time, you see, Barbara."

Barbara coughed drily. "I'm never afeard but you'll take care of yourself, Steven—of yourself and of your own pleasures! If you looked a little after others, too, you'd do well, I'm thinking. Here's Mrs. Steven been fretting herself till she's sick, and no wonder. Your wife *is* sick, Steven—there's the long and short of it—and it's ill of you to be riding and gallanting after other folks, and her sick at home, and so I tell you."

"Riding, gallanting after other folks?" cried Steven, the blood rushing hotly to his face. "What, in God's name, are you talking about? I didn't expect such nonsense from you, Barbara! Must a man leave off in the midst of a long run because he happens to have left a wife at home, or what?"

"A man should remember, whether he's on horseback or afoot, that he *has* a wife at home," said Barbara, undaunted. "You chose her, and you did wed her, Steven; and I say it's no man's part to neglect her now."

Just at this juncture the parlour door opened, and

"Steven, Steven! have you come at last?" sounded faintly, in Dot's voice, attuned to that plaintive minor, the like of which the hearts of most married men have had occasion to respond to in their lives.

With his conscience pricking him horribly, Steven went forward to meet her. "I'm really not fit to come near you, my love," he cried; "I'm mud all over; the country was never in such a state; and—and I hope, Dora, you have not waited tea for me. I'll just run and change my clothes, and——"

"Oh dear, not for my sake!" cried Dora, going back to the fire. "It's *my* bedtime. I shan't be up ten minutes longer. After sitting alone all day long, I'm sure one has not heart to care whether people's clothes are covered with mud or not."

She sat down, very upright indeed, in the tower of an armchair, and stared disconsolately at the fire. Steven pushed to the door, shutting out the distant thunders of Barbara's voice, and came across the room to his wife's side. "Dora," he said, after looking down at her white face for a minute or two, "I'm sorry I left you alone so long. It won't happen again. It was the best run we have had this season, and the Squire's horse unfortunately fell lame, and I had to take your cousin back to the Dene. If it hadn't been for that, I should have been here an hour ago or more."

Dot smiled: the most unpleasant smile, Steven thought, that he had ever seen on her face. "What a bore for you! How you must have anathematised Uncle Frank and his horse in your hearts, both of you. Steven," perfectly abruptly this, "I wonder how you would like it—I wonder what you would say—if I went on as you do?"

Steven did not answer. The suddenness of the attack left him, as his wife intended it should do, no time to collect his thoughts.

"I know very well that the world makes one rule for men and another for women," went on Dot; "but you don't belong, or pretend not to belong, to the world; and I ask you, on your conscience, what you would think if any man was to run after me—spend the same number of hours with me daily as you do with Katharine? Dear Kate is perfectly blameless," cried Mrs. Lawrence, quickly; warned, perhaps, by some rising expression round the corners of Steven's lips. "She likes riding and hunting, and naturally finds you a pleasanter companion than Uncle Frank. Kate is my best friend, and I hate myself for feeling a little jea—jealous!"—Dot hid away her face; "but I can't help it—and I know you never loved me! and I've been alone," holding out her hand to him, "eight hours and twenty minutes. Oh, Steven—Steven!"

The big manly heart of Steven Lawrence was overcome in an instant. He never thought of defending himself: he felt, with shame and contrition, that he was guilty: and Dora's skilful generosity in withdrawing blame from Katharine had disarmed him on the one point where he might have found strength.

"I've been selfish to leave you, Dora. My poor, foolish little Dora! to think that you should have fretted for me, though! As if—why, my dear, what *can* you have to be jealous of now?"

He knelt down at her side, and Dora put her arms round his neck and kissed him. Barbara, marching sternly in just then with supper for the master, found them so; and was reminded—long afterwards that

likeness haunted her!—of a certain picture of Samson and Delilah in the family bible.

As an ally stronger than all others against Katharine Fane, she had joined issue with Steven's wife an hour before; yet had she never liked—never trusted her so little as at this moment. Poor Barbara's ignorant love, you must remember, was that of a mother for her first-born; and such love is apt to be prophetic in its intuitions.

CHAPTER VII.

Dora Conquers.

"FOR the economy of the plan I undertake to answer," said Dora. "Five hundred francs, twenty pounds a month for an apartment in the Champs Elysées is ludicrously—simply ludicrously—cheap! and living, if one knows what one is about, can be reduced to a mere nothing in Paris."

Dora's husband opened his eyes wide.

"Oh! I know what you mean, Steven," cried Mrs. Lawrence; "we *flung* money away when we were there. I suppose people always do when they are first married. That extravagant English hotel! those preposterous wines! table-d'hôte dinners every day! best places at the theatre! Now, if we were living quietly in an apartment, just see the difference! We have our coffee in the morning, a little dish (I could dress it myself), with a glass of common wine at noon, a frugal dinner at six, and then, as people of our means ought, go to a cheap place at the theatre—if, indeed, we felt ourselves justified in going to theatres at all. I could keep our living there to a less sum, actually less, than it costs

us here at Ashcot; and it seems to me that anything in the world is better than spending one's money on doctors' bills. But, of course, you will do as you like," added Dot, with resignation. "I tell you of the offer I have got, and now it rests with you, dearest, to accept or reject it."

Steven's supper was over; and Dora, with a great increase of animation in her face, was kneeling dutifully beside him while he smoked his last pipe beside the fire. "You know who Grizelda Long is?" she went on, as Steven remained ominously silent on the subject of Parisian happiness and Parisian economy. "The poor girl was one of our bridesmaids,—don't you remember?"

"I remember," said Steven, "no girls except your cousin and the Miss Ducies. There was an ill-favoured elderly woman—"

"That was Grizelda—that was Grizelda!" cried Dora, clapping her hands with friendly exultation. "Poor dear thing, she certainly is not pretty, and I don't pretend to care for her, Steven, but she's the most obliging creature living. Now just let me read you a bit of her letter. You'll feel differently—I know you will—when you hear what she says about the apartment."

Mrs. Lawrence put her hand into her pocket, drew forth an envelope bearing a French stamp and postmark, then leaning forward so that her husband might look over her shoulder if he chose, took out the sheet of foreign paper it contained, and began to read aloud:

"My own—my ever dear Dora." So the letter began; and Steven, little as the deciphering of handwriting was his forte, could not but see the words.

"I—I—good gracious, I must have put my letters into the wrong envelopes! This is not Grizelda's." Dot's face fired crimson, and she crushed the letter hastily back into her pocket. "Ah! here it is, to be sure! How dreadfully stupid I'm getting in my old age, Steven!"

"And who is 'My own—my ever dear Dora' from, then?" said Steven, looking steadily at his wife. "You've been talking about jealousy, Dora. Suppose I was to become suddenly jealous, and say I insisted on reading that letter through?"

The tone of his voice was jesting, but there was a look about his face that Dot did not like; just a shadow of the look that she had first seen that day when he spoke of Dawes's dishonesty, and of his own Lynch notions respecting the administration of justice.

"You may read anything—everything I possess, Steven, I am sure!" And as she said this Dot moved away nearer to the fire, and the small hand furthest from her husband closed tightly over the letter in her pocket. "'My own—my ever dear Dora' is from our dear old governess, Miss Hayes, who, as it chances, is also in Paris just now."

"She writes like a man, both in handwriting and style," said Steven, laconically. "I didn't know women were ever so affectionate in their way of addressing each other."

"Oh dear, yes! Listen to Grizelda!" cried Dora, unfolding the second letter with self-possession thoroughly restored, "Grizelda, who has not spoken to me a dozen times in her life, and who, I know, *can't* really like me!"

“My dearest Dora,—It affords me the greatest pleasure possible to be of a little use to you and your husband.’ I must confess I wrote to her, Steven. I thought as the Phantom was in Paris, there could be no harm in setting her to find out about prices, whether we went or not.—‘Such apartments as you require are very hard—almost impossible—to get, but, by a most singular chance, I believe, I could at this moment put you into exactly what you want. My great friends, the Honourable Mr. and Mrs. Dynevor—’ Poor old Grizelda and her honourables!—‘are obliged by dear Lord Eastmeath’s death to go to Dublin, and are willing to let their apartments for the remainder of the term, two months, at a nominal rent. I have prevailed on them to let the matter stand over till I get your answer; and in great haste, and with affectionate love to Miss Fane when you see her, and remembrances to Mr. Lawrence,

“I am, dearest Dora,

“Your attached friend,

“GRIZELDA LONG.

“P.S.—The Dynevors ask the ridiculous price of five hundred francs a month! Entresol, sunny side of the Champs Elysées, every thing very small, but large enough for two people, and a *French* servant. Of course, you bring your own plate and linen.—G. L.’

“And now, Steven, cried Dora, “I put it to you, honestly, Is the offer tempting or is it not?”

“It is not at all tempting to me,” said Steven, laying down his pipe and looking straight before him

into the fire. "We spent six times as much as we ought when we were in Paris the last time, and, as far as I could see, got very poor enjoyment for our money."

Dot made him a little mock reverence, and smiled. "A hundred thanks for the compliment! You are speaking of our honeymoon, my dear."

"I am speaking of Paris," said Steven, "and I believe if we had gone to any other place on earth, I should have liked it better. If you really want change, you shall have it," he went on. "I'll take you for a week to Ramsgate, anywhere you like, but don't speak of Paris. Paris isn't suited to our means, or to me. Twenty pounds a month may seem ridiculously cheap to your friend, Miss Long. I call it ridiculously dear. At all events, it is a vast deal more than I can afford, or than I mean to pay."

"Then the thing is settled," said Dora, with the corners of her mouth twitching. "As to Ramsgate, I thank you! I would rather take to my room and remain there all the winter than go to Ramsgate. The thing is settled. I am ill: I believe my left lung is seriously affected. I get thinner, and my cough gets worse every day, and I thought Paris would set me up; and we have an offer, whatever you may say, of extraordinary reasonable lodgings there. Still, if you can't afford it, I say no more. I am not consulted in the housekeeping expenses, therefore you must excuse me for my ignorance of your means. Two hunters in the stable certainly don't *give* one the idea of extreme poverty!"

"I'm obliged to keep horses for the farm," said Steven. "Besides, I ride to sell, as you know. The

chesnut is as good as sold to Lord Haverstock at this moment."

"And when the chesnut is gone?"

"I am thinking of buying that grey filly of Mills, if I find she's up to my weight. He is only asking forty sovereigns for her and—"

"Forty sovereigns!" interrupted Dora; "the exact sum required for two months' hire of my poor little apartment!"

"And before the season was a quarter over I'd engage to sell her again for eighty," said Steven. "You don't understand, Dora. Horse dealing, in a small way, is part of my business, and for my horses to be seen I must ride them. 'Tis a business," he went on, "that my father and grandfather, and every one belonging to my name, have tried their hand at, and none of us ever made a bad thing of it yet."

"Business!" said Dot, with a flash of her great eyes. "Wonderfully pleasant business, I must say! To go, for *my* health, to Paris, would be very insipid compared to the 'business' of hunting, as well-mounted as any man in Kent, at Katharine Fane's side!"

"Katharine Fane!" cried Steven—I regret to add with an angry expletive closely following—"can't you leave her name alone? What has she got to do with this senseless scheme about going to Paris?"

"Everything," said Dot, calmly; all her good temper returning at the sight of Steven's anger. "Or, rather, she has everything to do with the senseless scheme not being carried out. I'm not playing at jealousy, Steven, and you are not playing at admiration of my cousin! When you first offered to marry me, you told me you had loved her as well as a man

could love a woman so far above him in rank, that there were things impossible to get over in a day, *et cetera*, but that you would try honestly to give me the first place in your heart; and so I accepted you."

Steven put his hand up wearily across his forehead.

"So I accepted you," went on Dot, "thinking, out of self-respect alone, that you would treat me with consideration when I was your wife—I, who, at least, had never despised, never misled you!"

Here another exclamation, not worthy, alas! to be recorded, broke from Steven's lips.

"Ah, it's very well to be violent—very well to use language like that," said Dora. "I say I am right, and that I have justice on my side. Why, your own servant, little as she likes me, pities me and condemns your goings on, and the way you leave me here alone. However, I'll say no more to you, Steven. I'll tell Kate, who has been good to me always, what I suffer, and ask her to have pity on me."

Steven grasped hold of her wrist with sudden passion. "Do you know what you are talking about?" he explained. "Do you know what you mean when you threaten to expose this absurd discussion to your cousin?"

Dora came a little nearer to her husband again, and looked down, nothing daunted, into his eyes. "My dear," she said, "don't hurt me—my poor little wrists haven't much muscle in them! and just give me a plain, straightforward answer, please, to what I'm going to ask you. *Have* you got over your old dream about Katharine? *Is* it natural that I should like you to be

with her, and away from me, every day, and all day long of your life?"

"I—we spoke of this when I came in," said Steven, "and I promised that I would remain at home with you more. You forgave me freely, remember, Dora. I looked upon the story as finished."

"Ah, if it could only be so!" said Dot, with a sigh. "But I'm afraid—I'm afraid there are some stories that are never quite finished while we live!" She drew her hand from his, then stole it round his neck again. "I'm no good—I've no place in the world," she sobbed. "Why do I fret at being ill? Why do I want Paris, or any other place, to set me up? I'll stop here alone, dear Steven—here at Ashcot—and never ask for a change, and never, if I can help it, be selfish or jealous about your amusements again!"

She cried—great tears, like a child's, running down her cheeks—for two or three minutes. At last, "How soon is this apartment to be vacant?" asked Steven. His voice was changed: he felt really touched, really conscience-stricken, by her sudden outburst of resignation. "I've been thinking, Dora, that, some way or another, I'll manage for you to have it. Perhaps we might contrive so that I needn't be with you the whole time?"

"Oh, dear, yes!" cried Dot, readily. "That is, you know, if you were really wanted on the farm."

"And we must do what we can to make up afterwards for the expense. If you think Paris will do you good, my dear, you shall go there, I promise you."

"Dearest Steven! There'll be no expense as regards dress, for, of course, I have got all my wedding

things not worn. What will the Ducies say? I'll go and tell Katharine to-morrow before church-time, and then write to Grizelda at once. Oh, I do feel in such spirits!"—the tears were on her cheeks still. "We'll go by Havre—what does sea-sickness matter? Havre is the cheapest route, and I mean to save every shilling that I can. We needn't have a regular servant; a charwoman at fifteen sous a day would be quite enough, with my knowledge of cooking. So lucky Grizelda Long is to be in Paris for the winter, isn't it?"

"Very lucky," said Steven, absently; "and your other friend, Miss Hayes, too."

"Well, as to Miss Hayes," said Dot, a good deal of colour coming into her face again at the mention of her old friend's name, "I don't really care much about her; indeed, she will most likely have left before we get there. Our friendship is a thing of the past. I shan't want society, you know, Steven. To walk about in the bright air will be enough for me, and to visit the galleries and places of interest with you, dear!"

Steven thought silently of the galleries and places of interest they had wearied through during their honeymoon; and in a few minutes' time Dot (singing and jumping, in spite of her thirty years, like a child who has been promised a holiday) ran upstairs, and he was left alone.

The first great contest, the first real struggle for power was over, he felt, between himself and his wife;—and his wife had conquered. It was well that she had done so! Rigidly taking himself to task as he sits here, still in his splashed hunting-clothes, staring, with moody face, into the fire, Steven feels that he

has been disloyal to Dora, to the only heart that beats for him, that belongs to him in the world. All the free-lance morality, the tawdry Don Juan doctrines of the school of Mr. Clarendon Whyte are unknown to poor ill-educated Steven. He is no better—feels himself to be no better—than other men; is passionate; easily beset by temptation; weakly prone to fall. But he is narrow-minded enough to hold sternest, unflinching opinions concerning honesty and justice; and the knowledge that he loves Katharine Fane—follows her, dreams of her, thrills at the touch of her hand—comes over him at this moment, accompanied by a sense of something very like dishonour. He looks back to his treatment of Dora from the hour of their marriage to this; knows that he has never loved her; knows with what automatic kindness he has sought to hide his want of love; knows how the happiest hour in the twenty-four has always been that in which, with blessed sense of liberty, he has broken from her side, and found himself free to seek Katharine Fane. Why, to-day, this poor little wife of his fretting for him by the fireside, what guilty hopes—no, not hopes, he has none—what guilty intoxication filled him as he rode along, silently watching her face in the twilight! what madness made him forget everything in the happiness of holding her for a moment in his arms, half-an-hour before Dora's kiss of welcome was to meet his cheek at home! Was this state of divided allegiance, this hankering after the woman who had deliberately rejected him, a life worthy of a man to lead? Nay, more, was it not dishonouring to Katharine as to Dora, that the latter, in her inmost heart, should have cause, however slight, either of jealousy or distrust?

He had loved Miss Fane from the first, you must remember, with a love that the majority of men would disbelieve in, or perhaps possess no line to fathom: even under the first intolerable smart of his disappointment, in the society of Lord Haverstock, and of Lord Haverstock's friends, had formed no theory of women unworthy for one white sister, Katharine, to take her place in it. He might degrade his love; he might degrade himself; his ideal of womanhood—so he thought—could never be lowered while Katharine lived; and in his blind worship of her all other women, Dora among the rest, had become exalted. He knew his wife to be vain and artificial; a creature unaccountably made up of small caprices, gold dust, millinery: without an employment, without an interest in life that he could understand; but still a woman—with all her smaller demerits, more than worthy of *his* reverence. What worse sins could be laid to Dora's account than undue love for balls and theatres, or perhaps a half-foolish, half-tender feeling for Mr. Clarendon Whyte in days gone by? Happy for him if his own conscience could show as unblotted a score!

Well, she had conquered now, poor child, and it was best for him that she had done so. In obeying her wishes he would be taken bodily away out of the reach of temptation; would be forced—not into forgetting, that was impossible—but out of the groove, at least, of loving Katharine Fane! Would have learnt to live without her before her marriage should divide them more irrevocably still, and for ever. . . .

He thought all this honestly; and yet, if the inmost desire of his heart could have availed him, Steven's life had been arrested at this very turning-point of its

course. Which of us, midway in some doubtful enterprise, has not felt the same? has not shrunk, cowardly, from the thought of any progress beyond the present scanty good? He had lost Katharine, but he saw her daily; was nothing to her but a sort of upper groom, of tolerated humble relation, yet was *that*. The past, with its honied poison, its alternation of fierce joys and miseries, was over; that moment in the boat when she had let him hold her hands; that moment on his marriage-day when they had bidden silent farewells, and he had guessed the meaning written on her white face—all over. The future belonged to Dora, and to Lord Petres. If the present; this very bubble on the foam, this very break of the wave upon the shore; would but stay!

And already the wave has broken, the bubble burst. And Dora, upstairs, is tearing Mr. Clarendon Whyte's letter into smallest atoms, while she vacillates in her mind between lilac serge and bronze-brown silk as a suitable costume wherein to travel to Paris.

CHAPTER VIII.

Lansquenet and Baccarat.

EARLY next morning Mrs. Lawrence, her health already improved, walked over to the Dene, and, not a little to her surprise, found Katharine a powerful auxiliary as to the Paris scheme. Mrs. Hilliard, whose temper was usually fitful on Sunday—it was her custom to replace sensational by theological fiction on that day—went dead against the proposition from the first. Other people in delicate health were obliged to stay winter and summer wherever their husbands chose to

live. A wife with her heart in its proper place should look above, not around and outside her own home, for solace and support.

"I do look above, Aunt Arabella," said Dot, "and I see damp, in great patches, all over the ceiling. It's the damp that makes me so ill. As to my heart being in its right place, I very much doubt it—'tis for that I want to have a Paris opinion. Uncle Frank, what do you say? If we have money enough to go, and as Steven is willing to do anything for my health, do you think there's any great sin in my wanting to have eight weeks more of amusement before I settle down in Ashcot for life?"

"I think Paris the worst place possible for you to go to," answered the Squire; early Mabilie recollections, and general visions of extravagance and money-borrowing rising before his mind. "It may be very well for you; but what's your husband, who doesn't know six words of French, to do with himself? Why I—I who speak the language," said the Squire, with pardonable vanity, "always find a week of Paris enough for me. Lawrence is a man taken up with his out-door pursuits. He'll be as miserable as a bandycoot, cooped up in a Paris entresol—and during the best part of the hunting season too!"

"I don't know anything about bandycoots," said Mrs. Lawrence, "but I know *I* am perfectly miserable cooped up alone at Ashcot now! Why are husbands and husbands' amusements always to be studied so much, I want to know? It's very pleasant, no doubt, Uncle Frank, for Steven to shoot, or course, or hunt, every day of the week; with you and Katharine, but why am I not to be considered? I'm a human being,

I suppose, although I do labour under the immense disadvantage of being a wife."

And then it was that Katharine, to Dot's astonishment, struck boldly in to the rescue: Katharine, like Steven, had had her lonely meditations, her remorseful vigil the night before! "I agree with you thoroughly, Dot. I think that people like papa and me can't judge how miserable the country is to you in winter. Now, papa, I ask you, mustn't a southerly wind and a cloudy sky seem very different to poor Dot at home, to what they do to you and me just as we skirt round Barlow's wood, a promising soft rain in our face, and hear the first bay of the hounds in the distance? If—if Steven was against this Paris plan it would be different, but he is not; and I say, Dot ought to go. She is not looking strong, and, just now, at the beginning of winter, a change of air may do wonders for her."

And later in the afternoon, when the cousins were alone together, Katharine did more than express favourable opinions; she offered—Dot faintly protesting against such generosity!—the loan of one hundred pounds, in furtherance of the scheme. "Don't refuse me, dear Dot," she said. "My money lies at the bank, of no use to me, or anyone else. Everything I want, and don't want, papa buys me, you know. Sometimes," added Katharine, half sadly, "I think my fate is to be like that of Miss Kilmansegg. Gold, gold, nothing but gold, and never an ounce of happiness to be bought with it!" and she sighed.

"Well," said Dot, "whoever Miss Kilmansegg may have been, if she had plenty of money, I envy her. My dear Kate, money does everything. If I could keep a carriage, and see my friends about me, and re-

build Ashcot, and have proper servants, and go up to town when I liked, I should be the happiest woman in Kent. Our difference of tastes divides—must divide—Steven and me now; whereas, if we had plenty of money, we should never know whether our tastes were different or not, because each could gratify them.”

“And you will accept what I ask you then?”

“Dear Katharine! You put it in such a way that I feel it impossible to refuse.”

So the matter was settled. That night a letter was written, bidding Grizelda Long take the apartments, in Steven’s name, off the hands of the Honourable Augustus Dynevor; and a week later, with packages, said old Barbara, enough for six decent families when she was young, Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence again started by the afternoon Folkestone train on their road to Paris.

“It is better so, Kate,” said the Squire, on the evening of their departure. “I shall miss Lawrence, and so will you, for a bit; but I believe it’s as well Dot should have her way just at first. When she has gone through two months with Master Steven in an entresol, you may take my word for it, she will have had enough of Paris! The man was never meant to live in cities, and my opinion is we shall see him back here in Clithero before a fortnight is past.”

But the Squire’s prophecy did not come true; indeed,—to judge from Dot’s letters—it seemed that Steven quickly fell as much under the influence of Parisian enchantment as his wife. At first, “Steven is a little bit puzzled to know what to do with himself,” Mrs. Lawrence wrote; “but we are always to-

gether, and I try to interest myself in what I think most likely to interest him." Then, later on, after rose-coloured accounts of balls and parties, for Dot was beginning to make her way into "society:" "I can't say that Steven cares for such things," she would say, "but he goes, and is very patient." Then, later still: "I have engagements for every afternoon and every evening of the week, and dear Steven, I am glad to say, has found friends and occupations that suit him too. We are perfectly contented, both of us; my health is wonderfully better; my heart, tell Aunt Arabella, quite in its right place; and I shall never, never forget that it was chiefly your kindness, Kate, that enabled us to come here."

Steven Lawrence leading a contented town-life with friends, with occupations that suited him! Katharine, guided by I know not what instinctive fear, despatched a letter at once to George Gordon, who was in Paris, bidding him write her word, without delay, as to how Dora and her husband were getting on. "Dot tells me she goes out a great deal, but among what kind of people?" wrote Miss Fane, "and does her husband accompany her? Lord Petres, as you know, is going through his usual Christmas martyrdom at Eccleston, so in his absence I trouble you—will you forgive me?—with my silly questions about the gossip of Paris. Dear Captain Gordon, you are so good always in executing my commissions that I am sure you won't mind finding out as much as you possibly can for me about the Lawrences and the Lawrences' friends, before you write next."

And accordingly, five or six days later, she got back this intelligence:—quite plainly worded, as you

see; George Gordon knew Katharine Fane too well to think of putting anything he had to say to her into pretty or dubious phrases: "Your cousin, Mrs. Lawrence, does go out a great deal, among a set of English people to whom, I should say, Miss Long or, perhaps, Mr. Clarendon Whyte must have introduced her. Her husband seldom shows; never, in the society of his wife. Is he a rich man? I should hope so. His friends, I hear, are people whose time is chiefly taken up in playing lansquenet and baccarat; and lansquenet and baccarat are expensive games, when a man first goes through his apprenticeship to them in Paris. I see Mrs. Lawrence daily in the Champs Elysées, and sometimes at the opera, but have not yet been able to speak to her. You know how much love Clarendon Whyte and I had for each other of old? Well, whenever I have seen Mrs. Lawrence, as yet, Mr. Clarendon Whyte, has happened, unfortunately, to be at her side."

Clarendon Whyte in Paris, the constant companion of Mrs. Lawrence; Steven going through his apprenticeship at lansquenet and baccarat! The news seemed so absurdly, so palpably unlikely, that Katharine, for the first five minutes, laughed over George Gordon's letter; then, calling to mind how Mrs. Dering had ceased, of late, to mention Clarendon Whyte's name; calling to mind, too, a certain half-tone of concealment, in a good deal that Dot had written about her more intimate English friends; she went round to the opposite extreme of credulity, and if she had had the means would have flown off herself to Paris, on the instant. True? what should hinder it, alas! from being true? Had she not had a presentiment of evil when

she wrote her letter to George Gordon? What love for Steven had, in reality, ever effaced the old folly from Dora's heart? What stability of character was there to keep Dora straight under the temptations of Paris? Wearied with uncongenial frivolity at home; with "engagements for every afternoon and every evening of the week;" what more likely than that Steven should seek relief in the society of men abroad, unsuspecting of the perils to which over-much liberty might lead a woman so fickle and so unballasted as his wife? After a day and night of silent anxiety—for neither to her mother nor the Squire had she courage to confess her fears—Katharine made up her mind for action, and started boldly up to town by the earliest morning train, determined to lay bare the state of the case to Mrs. Dering. Slight though the sympathy was between them in matters of sentiment, Katharine had fullest respect still for Mrs. Dering's opinion on all worldly affairs. Dora Lawrence was Arabella's cousin. Dora's good name, the good name of Dora's husband, were subjects in which every member of the family must be supposed to have some degree of vested or vicarious interest. Mrs. Dering had friends of her own in Paris, and could, at least, find out how much truth there was in George Gordon's account; at least could advise what kind of warning or of reproach should be addressed to Dora.

"Bella," she said, within ten minutes of her arrival, "I have come to town to-day to see you and the children, of course—but that is not the real object of my visit. I have something very miserable to tell you, something that concerns us all terribly nearly. Read this," and Katharine drew forth George Gordon's letter,

and put it, without a word of comment, into her sister's hand.

Mrs. Dering read it through carefully; folded, returned it into its envelope, and to Katharine. "And what is the misery about, Kate? and what is it that concerns us all so nearly?"

"Can you ask?" cried Katharine. "Steven Lawrence spending his time at cards—I suppose they play these horrid games with cards—and Dot—I can't bear to speak of it!—Dot going into a doubtful kind of society alone, or rather with Mr. Clarendon Whyte for her companion! What ought we to do! Shall I write? Shall I get papa to go and look after them?"

Mrs. Dering smiled. "Dora would pay so much attention to your letter, or to poor dear papa's good advice! You are honest and single-hearted as ever, Katharine," she added, "and naturally feel disgusted at what you have heard. I take it all as the painful but inevitable consequence of Dora's getting her freedom. She has no principles, my dear, as I have always told you; and without principles—without principles, a woman as vain and as fond of pleasure as poor Dora is tolerably sure to end . . . as she is doing! We must hope for the best," added Mrs. Dering, calmly; "and really so many people have taken up this fashion of being fast that what once would have put a woman out of society, as likely as not may pass unobserved now. We hear nothing very bad as yet, you must recollect."

"I don't know what you call bad?" said Katharine, hotly. "For a woman as young and pretty as Dot to go about in Paris without her husband, and for the husband to spend his time with his own gambling associates, seems bad enough to me. Bella, tell me

candidly, had you heard anything of this before?" cried poor Katharine. "Had you an idea that Dot and Clarendon Whyte were meeting again like this in Paris?"

"I knew that Mr. Whyte was in Paris, and I knew that Dora Lawrence was there, dressing and driving, and living altogether in very bad style. But small gossip, as you know, Kate," said Mrs. Dering, "is not one of my sins. I heard these things, but I did not repeat them, even to you all at home. If one's relations are discreditable, I never see that anything is to be gained by making a noise about their discreditability oneself."

Katharine was silent for a minute or two. "I am quite determined to do something," she cried at last. "Dot may be foolish and fond of show and attention, but I know she will always mind what I say to her. As to her husband—"

"As to her husband—this baccarat-playing husband?"

"Steven is too upright, too simple of heart to suspect evil in others," said Katharine, slowly, and lifting her eyes full to Mrs. Dering's. "He may, or may not, be losing his money at cards; at one time, I remember, when—when he left off coming to the Dene, papa used to tell me he played too high at Lord Haverstock's; used to say that gambling, in some form or other, runs in the Lawrences' blood. All this is no business of ours. It is of Dot and of Mr. Whyte that I am thinking, and I say Steven in his ignorant confidence might see no evil in an intimacy that a man of the world——Bella, I can't talk about it—there's a disgrace even in the suspicion of disgrace! but I'll go

to them. I'll make papa take me over to Paris, and I'll bid Steven bring his wife home to Ashcot at once."

An indignant light shone in Katharine Fane's eyes. "You are very enthusiastic, child," said Mrs. Dering, coldly; "above all, I remark, in matters where Steven Lawrence is concerned. If you take my advice you will just let these people manage their own affairs themselves. Mrs. Lawrence, like a good many wives, is more amused by other society than by her husband's; Mr. Lawrence, like a good many husbands, is more amused by baccarat and trente-et-un than by his wife. Of all things not new under the sun a household like this is the one that the least calls for hysterics or astonishment."

But Katharine seemed hardly to listen to Mrs. Dering's optimist and sufficiently-reasonable philosophy. "If it was anyone else," she said, half to herself, "any other man than Mr. Clarendon Whyte, I should not feel as I do."

"And I," said Mrs. Dering, "precisely because it is Mr. Clarendon Whyte, am disposed to be charitable. Mr. Whyte—we had best speak openly, Kate—is the last man living to ask Mrs. Steven Lawrence—without position, without money, without anything!—to run away from her husband."

"I—I am not thinking of running away!" cried Katharine, her face afire.

"Then what *are* you thinking of, Kate, dear? Please let us be reasonable. As a companion in her drives, or a partner at these third-class balls, it seems to me that Dora could hardly have done better than select Mr. Clarendon Whyte. In London, I confess,

it would be different; but in Paris, particularly among such a set as Dora has got into, Mr. Clarendon Whyte, no doubt, is taken at his own valuation still."

"Taken at his own valuation! in London it would be different!" said Katharine, opening her eyes. "I don't think when we were at Brighton you would have spoken like that, Arabella. You seem to think of Clarendon Whyte now what I, unsupported, have thought of him always."

"Exactly so," said Mrs. Dering, with perfect evenness of temper. "Did I not tell you—no? then, that does show how little I am to be accused of writing gossiping letters! Some weeks ago, just about the time you returned to Clithero, I think it must have been, all poor Mr. Whyte's true and authentic history came to light, and he has never shown his face either in London or Brighton since. He really was an impostor, Katharine. You were perfectly right in everything you used to say. Some one appeared on the scene—who was it now? well, never mind, some one who knew all about him, anyhow—and the great English connections, and the tigers he had shot in Bengal, and the sacks he had caused to be thrown into the Bosphorus, were all a fiction. His father was a hatter in Oxford Street. Are you sure you won't have a glass of sherry? I'm afraid you will have more than an hour to wait before lunch."

"And you have never seen him since?—I don't want any sherry, thanks. You have banished the man from your house, because his father was a hatter?"

"I have done nothing at all," said Mrs. Dering, with a quiet smile. "I met Mr. Clarendon Whyte at a ball just after this ridiculous story came to light,

and he asked me for a dance, and I had none left to give him. A man in that kind of position ought to have come early, or not have attempted to dance. I think, myself, it would have been more dignified, perhaps, to have stayed away altogether. A day or two afterwards I heard he left England. What strange vicissitudes there are in some human beings' lives, Kate!"

"And what strange blanks in some human beings' hearts!" thought Katharine, looking at her sister's handsome unmoved face. "I never cared, or pretended to care, for Mr. Clarendon Whyte," she cried, hastily; "but if I had seen as much of him as you did, Bella—and really he used to be kind to the children, was fond of little Floss, I think—I should have been sorry for him in his humiliation, or what he considered to be humiliation."

"And so I was extremely sorry for him," said Mrs. Dering, "and I always speak well of him now—poor young man! Whatever his birth may have been, I say Mr. Clarendon Whyte had the feelings of a gentleman; would the General and I have seen so much of him had it been otherwise? As to his conquests in Indian jungles and elsewhere, is there a man or woman amongst us all who doesn't kill rather more tigers in imagination than in fact? The principal commandment Mr. Whyte broke, I fancy, was the eleventh—that which outweighs all the rest; he was found out. How is Lord Petres? Still at Eccleston, I suppose? If you do go to Paris, I should strongly advise you to get some of your trousseau there. Dot, with all her faults, is as good an adviser as you can find where silks and velvets are concerned."

Thus, with more of the same nature, spoke Mrs. Dering; honestly, and according to her lights. The world to her was a theatre, where men and women acted together in masks; where what was said or done, sinned or suffered, unmasked and behind the scenes, mattered nothing. As long as Mr. Clarendon Whyte was "received," she had received him. As long as the Lawrences went on like other people, not coming to any open or avowed disgrace, there was something simply ridiculous to Mrs. Dering in gratuitously troubling one's head on their account. If they did come to disgrace, let it pass—with as little spoken commentary of ours, the well-thought-of relations, as possible! As for advice, a tolerably wide experience of life had taught her that its general effects were: first, to increase the down-hill pace of the persons advised; secondly, to react against the adviser. If Mrs. Lawrence (as it must be allowed was possible) was walking just as straight as the rest of the world, there could be no need of Katharine's presence in Paris; if Mrs. Lawrence was walking crooked, Katharine, for her own sake, must keep away from her. What would be the effect of a letter to Steven? Mrs. Dering was too ignorant of the customs of savage nations to say what the effect of anything would be on Steven Lawrence. She would certainly not advise writing to any civilized man on a theme so delicate as his own wife's frivolities. Baccarat, it must be remembered, could not, of its very nature, last for ever; neither could driving in the Champs Elysées in daily new bonnets and dresses. As soon as the money was exhausted, Kate might rest assured Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence, steady-going Darby and Joan, would again return to their farm.

But all Mrs. Dering's reasoning, all Mrs. Dering's admirable morality of selfishness, was insufficient to banish the haunting fear that had taken possession of Katharine's mind; and so, two days later, a letter from Dora coming meanwhile, with still no mention in it of Clarendon Whyte's name, she mustered courage enough to broach the subject to the Squire. The wisdom of a kind and simple heart might be more serviceable than the wisdom of the world, perhaps, in such a strait as this. "Papa," quite abruptly she began, as they were riding home to dinner, along the same road where she had ridden that last night with Steven, "what sort of game do you consider baccarat?"

"Baccarat?" said the Squire; "well, I've never played it myself, and never seen it played; but I know it is the favourite game now-a-days, at which Englishmen abroad are fleeced by those rascally foreigners. Haverstock lost eight thousand pounds at it, they say, the first time he went to Paris after he came of age. Pray, Miss Kate, what has put baccarat into that wise head of yours?"

"Steven Lawrence is playing at it, papa, that's all. I heard so a day or two ago; but I did not like at first to tell you, and Dot is going on very extravagantly, I'm afraid. I found it all out by accident, from a correspondent I have. Bella has heard the same story too, and—and don't you think we ought to do something to try and bring them home?"

Mr. Hilliard was dead silent; sure sign that one of the quick bursts of passion that occasionally exploded in the good little man's heart, was brewing. "The confounded fool that I've been!" he exclaimed at last. "Leaving the poor girl's money in her own hands, as

he 'generously' wished, instead of tying it up, principal and interest, as tight as I could tie it. Of course he's playing at baccarat! I might have known the stock he comes of well enough to be sure he would play baccarat, and every other devilment, when temptation came. Gambling with his wife's money, and then, when it's gone, expecting me to lend him more! But he's mistaken; Master Lawrence is deucedly mistaken, if he thinks I am going to supply him with money for his pleasant vices. Baccarat, too! a man whose grandfather was no better than a day-labourer, and who can barely spell his name himself, playing baccarat!"

Katharine fired up in a moment. "I don't see that the condition of a man's grandfather heightens or lessens the folly of his gambling, papa; and I don't know why we should take for granted that Steven, if he is losing at all, is losing Dot's money."

"He must be losing," cried the Squire, angrily, and with the perfect conviction of injustice,—“and he must be losing her money—what other money has he got to lose? But it's no business of mine—it's no business of mine! If my advice had been taken, they would never have gone to Paris at all. Let him ruin himself. Dora will always know where to look for a home as long as I live; but don't let him come to me for help, that's all I have to tell Master Lawrence. Don't let him look to me for help."

"I hear, too," said Katharine, determined, now that she had begun, to tell her whole story out, "I hear that Dora is very extravagant; is—is not going on as we could wish. She is always out at balls and

theatres, papa, and alone—without her husband, I mean."

"Very naturally," said Mr. Hilliard. "You wouldn't have the poor girl run after him to the gaming-tables and his associates there, would you? You knew what Dora was when you advised her to go to Paris. Of course she is extravagant. Not one woman in fifty, let me tell you, would care to be saving over francs when she knew that her husband was ruining himself and her too by hundreds of pounds."

"And who says Steven Lawrence is doing anything of the kind?" exclaimed Katharine. "Oh, papa, I see I had better be perfectly honest with you. It's not Steven—it's not about Steven's going on that I am anxious, but about Dot. She is in a fast, bad set of people in Paris. She lets herself be seen everywhere with a man for whom she had a foolish kind of half-liking before she married, and altogether I'm afraid is getting her name lightly spoken of. I didn't like to tell you this straight out, and so I began first about Steven and his card-playing. Oh, papa, what does the loss of a little money matter? It is Dot we must think about, and bring back to Ashcot at once, if we can."

"Bring Dot back?" stammered the Squire. "Why, Kate, you don't mean to tell me—Good God, child! what does all this mean? why have you tried to keep it from me?" The Squire reined in his horse to a standstill, and his face got as red as fire. "You don't mean to tell me that that girl—her honeymoon scarce over, and in love, as I thought, with her husband's very shadow—is misconducting herself?"

"Papa, dear," answered Katharine, with down-bent

head, "there are many things that people do in the world—the fast world—now, that you would call misconduct. As much as I know about Dora, I tell you. She goes to balls and parties continually. She is seen at them all without her husband, and in the society of another man. People generally might think lightly of this, but I, knowing Steven as I do, think it looks very bad for poor Dora's future happiness."

"Then why don't he look after her?" said Mr. Hilliard. "She's vain, and pretty, in her style; just the sort of little woman—poor thing!—that these confounded Frenchmen would make much of. Why don't Lawrence look better after her?"

The Squire loosened his reins, and they walked on again through the darkening lanes in silence. At last, "Do you think if I was to write to Steven I should do good?" Katharine asked. "Just hint to him that it would be better if—"

"If he were to look a little closer after his own honour? No, Katharine, no! Never meddle between married people." The Squire said this much in the same tone in which he might have said, "Never meddle with burning pitch!" "However things turn out, *you* are sure to get blamed by both of them in the end."

"That's a good deal like what Arabella told me. Her advice was, to let everything take its own course. But—oh, papa," cried Katharine, "you and Arabella generally see everything so differently, that, I must confess, I did not expect to hear the same counsel from you."

Mr. Hilliard, upon this, put his horse into a trot; and nothing more was said until they were riding up

the avenue at home. "Kate, my dear," he began then, "you were right to tell me of all this, and I'm ready to allow I spoke unjustly about Lawrence. The life he has led makes the lad younger than his years, and many an honest enough man will burn his fingers, for once in his life, under temptation. Dora is a little fool—that we always knew!—but we mustn't let her play the fool worse or longer than we can help. Now, what do you want me to do, child?"

"I want you to take me to Paris for a week," cried Katharine; "that is, if mamma can spare us. It wouldn't be a great expense?"

"Never mind the expense," said the Squire.

"And either we would bring Dot home with us, or make Steven promise to take better care of her in Paris. Whether we fail or not, isn't it at least worth the trial?"

And before bed-time that night the plan was settled. Poor Mrs. Hilliard at first was refractory: could not see how Dora's affairs mattered to them now that she was married: could see, still less, why sick and dying people were to be sacrificed because of the ill-doings of those in health? She would go up to Arabella—no, she would not: she would destroy herself by going to Paris: no, she would be a blessed martyr and stay at home, and hope—hope that they would enjoy themselves without her! Finally the scheme of martyrdom carried the day: the Squire promising to bring back a Cashmere shawl, silk dress, laces, and gloves, as propitiatory offerings; and, on the following Monday, two days hence, it was decided that Katharine and Mr. Hilliard should start. Not a word was to be written meanwhile to the Lawrences themselves. "If you want

to know what a truant school-boy is about," said the Squire, "don't tell him beforehand that you are coming to look after him! If we want really to find out how Dora and her husband are going on, we must walk quietly some fine morning to their lodgings, and just see them in their usual every-day life—don't you say so, Arabella?"

"I say nothing, Mr. Hilliard, I am too old-fashioned to enter into these philanthropic schemes. When I and my Richard were young it was accounted a man's duty to consider his *own* wife, to attend to the happiness of his *own* household, not of other people's!"

And then Mrs. Hilliard closed her eyes: to dream, undisturbed, about cachemires and silks, Parisian laces and gloves—a little, perhaps, of the days when she and her Richard were young, and when no such conditions of martyrdom were, under any circumstances, imposed upon her!

CHAPTER IX.

In Paris.

DURING the first week after his arrival in Paris, Steven Lawrence's life was only passively miserable. The mild, open winter, that had been so excellent for hunting in Kent, was detestable to him amidst the closeness and mud and fog of city streets; but he endured it. Endured being marched up and down the piazzas of the Palais Royal and of the Rue de Rivoli of a morning; endured theatres of an evening; endured living in rooms wherein his large figure had scarcely space to turn, and against the ceiling of which he

knocked his head if he attempted to stand upright; endured millinery; endured Dora! And, at the end of the week, said to himself: "I have gone through one eighth of it already. Seven weeks more, and I shall be on the farm, almost free again!" After this came brighter weather; also Grizelda Long, who had been absent for a few days, and on her return to Paris at once constituted herself a daily visitor of Dora's; and then Steven's sufferings, from passive, became acute ones.

Grizelda Long at this time was on one of the lowest spokes even in her poor fortune's wheel. Unpaid companion, half lady's-maid, half interpreter, to a capricious, vulgar woman (the same Indian widow who had once been the mainstay of the Knightsbridge household): with a good deal of time on her hands, for the widow had friends of her own, "to whom, of course, poor Miss Long could not expect to be introduced;" and with no money in her pockets. These were the conditions under which Grizelda was living out the present portion of her phantom existence! "Just beginning my delightful campaign in Paris," the poor soul wrote, with unflagging cheerfulness, to her London friends. But what, to another woman, would have been durance viler than the lot of a seamstress, sewing her fingers to the bone in her own attic, was bearable to Grizelda. She was floating still! Still able to run after odds and ends of society; to organize these odds and ends together; to intrigue among them; occasionally—despite the widow—to show her forlorn wreathed head in third-class salons, and such concert-rooms and theatre-boxes as her friends, of their charity, would give her the right to enter.

"I know every one," she told Dora, on the first occasion of their meeting. "Lady Cowley and the Russian ambassadress have unfortunately both got influenza, so, for the moment, I can do nothing for you there. But I know all the ball-giving English, and numbers of excellent French people, and I shall be very glad to introduce you. What carriage have you got? My dear Mrs. Lawrence, do you mean to say your husband has got you no carriage? I assure you it is a mistake. It does not *do*," said Grizelda, at this moment possessing about fifty-six francs in the world, "to be seen in any of these voitures de remise. Now for—I forget how much a week, but we'll ascertain to-day—you can hire the very brougham the Dynevors had. Capital horse, English coachman, dark brown livery; no one would know it was hired.

Dora answered, that a brougham, even a brougham hired by the week, would be extravagance entirely beyond her husband's means: then lay awake half the night regretfully dreaming of it. Next day, the weather happening to be wet again, she spoilt a new dress by walking to their restaurant dinner—those cheap Palais Royal dinners at which Steven was so starved, but which were a remove better than the horrible attempt his wife made once of cooking something at home! And then, as a matter of economy, the hiring of a brougham, with an English coachman in brown livery, began, day and night, to be urged upon Dora's husband.

This, I say, was the beginning of the poor fellow's active sufferings. He did not want to squander what little money he had of his own (the Squire had already lent him a considerable sum to put out upon his farm,

and the thought of the debt pressed heavily on him); he would have been more loath still for Dora to touch the capital of her small marriage-portion; and kindly, but with no lack of determination, he told her that the thing was impossible. Cabs he would hire for her, as many and as often as she wished. She need not drive even in the common fiacre of the streets. One of the better kind of *Americaines* she might have, with as clean a driver, for a Frenchman, as could be found, six days a week—nothing as yet would induce him to let Dora amuse herself on Sunday—but a brougham, no! Grizelda Long and her opinions might be—very valuable, indeed, in their proper place. He was not going to be guided by them. He was not (with extreme resolution this) going to set up a sham-private brougham, with a sham-private coachman, and ridiculous hired livery, to please any one.

At the end of some hours, after holding further council with her friend: "If you please, Steven," said Dora, "as you will not spend your money to please me, may I spend my own? I have a hundred pounds in my desk lying useless . . . oh, look incredulous! I'll show them to you—Bank of England notes . . . May I spend them—I mean a few of them—in hiring the brougham? It will save you expense in the end."

"Do as you choose," said Steven, turning from her. "I have given my opinion. Act as you like for the future."

So the first fruit of Katharine's generosity was the setting Mrs. Dora up in her hired brougham, which soon, with the small rose-and-white over-dressed doll it contained, became pretty well known in the eyes of a certain portion of the Parisian public. Dora, just at

first, professed herself averse to driving alone, and poor dear Grizelda's bonnets, she said, were really so unlike what bonnets ought to be that, whatever one's kindly feelings, it was impossible to be seen with her by daylight; it was therefore manifestly incumbent on Steven to be his wife's companion. Living in rooms where he could neither breathe nor stand upright, obliged to dress daily in a frock-coat and high hat, dining on Palais Royal dishes that at once sickened and starved him, and now crushed into a little toy-brougham, of which one window at least must be always shut for fear of Dora's complexion, or because the damp took the curl out of feathers, or the crimp out of hair, or other cogent reason! He bore it for three days; bore physical sufferings almost equalling those of a wild animal in its eight feet of cage; then struck boldly: "He would do many things; would walk, eat, dress as he was bidden; would never—so help him heaven!—torture his limbs into a cursed close car no bigger than a nut-shell again while he lived."

"You needn't use bad language, my dear," said Dora, with thorough amiability; had the domestic drives been so animated that she need mourn over their discontinuance? "Amuse yourself well," kissing her hand to him as she ran, full-dressed, out of the room, "and I, if I can, must find some one else willing to take your place."

Was this meant as a threat, Steven wondered afterwards? Who shall say? Who shall tell whether it was by purest accident or otherwise that when Mrs. Lawrence left her carriage by the lake (for this January afternoon was like June, and all the world

went to the Bois) she heard the only human voice that had power to make her heart—such a heart as she possessed—flutter, and turning round saw Mr. Clarendon Whyte, unapproachable in his gloves and neck-tie as ever, and with beautiful, cruel, Mephistophelian smile at her side!

After a surly husband at home, a surly husband using bad words about one's few poor little pleasures, what a change to be in the society of a being whose every mellifluous word is a reproach, flattering to vanity; whose every look is a compliment! . . . "I have seen you before more than once, but not near enough to bow," said Dot, quietly; for whether the meeting was planned or accidental it did not seem that either was much taken by surprise now that they had met.

"I heard you had arrived, but didn't know whether I ought to call on your—husband," answered Mr. Whyte, with an accent, tragipathetic, on that word "husband" that made Dora turn her face away, and almost believe in her own mind that she was blushing.

The January afternoon was like June; and Mrs. Lawrence, well-dressed and animated, met nothing but admiring glances as she walked up and down in the clear winter sunshine with Mr. Clarendon Whyte. Poor little butterfly Dot! It was the brightest hour by far that she had known since her marriage, this first hour of amusement in which Steven had no part. He was a good, dear, honest creature, Steven, and in her very heart she believed she was growing to be fond of him. But then Mr. Clarendon Whyte's coat was so differently cut, and the turn of his moustache was so faultless, and his low calibre of intellect—I

use her own words—suited hers so exactly, and this was Paris sunshine, and she was one of the prettiest women walking by that sunny mock lake. And—ah—ah! (without going too deeply into analyzation of one's happiness) if all life could only be like to-day!

All life certainly would not be; only six more weeks, and a fraction, thought Dot; then let the six weeks and a fraction be turned to the best possible account. So next day, the sun continuing to shine, the brown brougham at the same hour stopped by the lake, and a porcelain marchioness figure, with short fair locks and glittering equipments, tripped out, to be joined in ten minutes by an Adonis almost as glittering as herself. And the next day the same thing took place; and the next . . . as the two were walking along: Dot listening with well-pleased face to her companion's murmured platitudes, yet not unmindful of the admiration her own toilette was awakening in the crowd: Steven maladroitly, inopportunately, as is the habit of these old-fashioned husbands, came across their path.

He stopped for a moment, spoke good-humouredly to his wife, not uncivilly to Mr. Clarendon Whyte; then went on his way, thereby showing more knowledge of life, Dora felt, than might have been expected of him. In the evening, as they were sitting alone in their apartment—for now Mrs. Lawrence had organized a plan of having execrable dinners sent in from a neighbouring cook-shop—"Dora," said Steven, all at once, "how long have you known that your friend, Mr. Whyte, was in Paris?"

"Oh, not till to-day," said Dora, rather from sudden loss of self-possession than from a guilty sense

that there was anything to conceal. "Mr. Clarendon Whyte had just come to Paris—that is, I didn't know he was here before, and—and he is going to call on you to-morrow, Steven."

"He is very kind," said Steven, laconically.

"It will be pleasant for you to know some one—to be able to associate with men when you are tired of me," cried Dora. "Mr. Whyte, if you like, will introduce you at his club. He told me so to-day."

"He is very kind," said Steven once more; then took up his hat, and went out—the first time he had done so yet of an evening—leaving Dot to her own thoughts.

Did he suspect her, she wondered uneasily, as soon as she found herself alone? Suspect her, not of the letter that had been written and answered from Ashcot—that was impossible; but of prevarication? Did he know that she and Clarendon Whyte had already met? Was he going to watch, to mistrust, to coerce her? In about an hour's time Steven came in again. He walked up to the table where Dot as usual was working her brain over some new combination of gorgeous colour for to-morrow, took both her hands, and drawing her to him, bade her, in the kind of way one would bid a child, look him straight in the face. "Don't tell me falsehoods any more, my dear," he said, in a voice that brought the facile tears into Dot's eyes. "You were walking yesterday with Clarendon Whyte, and what was there in it to hide? Walk with him, with any one you choose, every day of the week. Amuse yourself and get strong and well, my poor little Dora, but don't tell me a falsehood again!"

"And never while I live, Steven!" cried Mrs. Law-

rence, in a flutter of repentance. "I was afraid you might be cross—I can't help it, you know, but I *am* a very little bit afraid of you always. And then," holding down her face, "as I was jealous once about you and Kate, I thought perhaps——"

"I should be jealous about Mr. Clarendon Whyte?" said Steven, with a chill sort of laugh. "Set your mind at rest, child. When I am jealous of my wife it will be once, and only once; not without cause, you may be sure!"

She held up her face; she threw her arms round his neck. "You'll never have cause to be jealous of me, Steven! Don't let us even talk of such horrible things. Now, how could you possibly know, dearest, that I saw Mr. Clarendon Whyte yesterday? And to think—deceitful man!—of your never mentioning it to me!"

"Nay," said Steven, quietly, "I waited for you to mention it. How I knew it," he added, "was by using my own eyes. I was close behind you when you got out of your carriage by the pond; but you were too much occupied with other people to look at me."

To this extent peace was made; to this extent the renewal of Dora's intimacy with Mr. Clarendon Whyte was sanctioned by Dora's husband. Closely following came a time when little Mrs. Lawrence began to get invitations to balls, through Grizelda Long, through Clarendon Whyte, through any one, every one who could open for her the easy portals of second-class Anglo-Parisian society. And again, as at first starting of the brougham, Steven's attendance was enforced for a week. The torture of standing for hours in the

corners of crowded ball-rooms was not physically as unendurable as being imprisoned in a small close carriage for an afternoon at a time, but was bad enough. He did not dance himself; had never, indeed, seen the inside of a ball-room till now; and there was nothing edifying to him in the spectacle of his wife waltzing with every well-gilt fop—Mr. Clarendon Whyte most—who chose to invite her. So after a week or ten days of ball-going, amicably, without a word of remonstrance on either side, it grew to be a thing of course that Steven should just accompany his wife to the scene of her night's dissipation, stand patiently with his hat under his arm for two dances or so, then slip away unnoticed from the house, and go home to his bed.

Dot found that she breathed immeasurably freer after he was gone. Poor dear fellow! it took away one's enjoyment to know that there was a long-suffering husband, standing like a statue, martyred for one's selfish pleasure night after night, and really, if one thought of it, what numbers of other married women went out alone, Mrs. D——, and Madame C——, and little Lady B—— (poor inch-deep Dora, in what a wake to follow!). What need was there to torture him by that nightly putting on of dress suit and white gloves at all? Could she not chaperon Grizelda, find some one or other to go with—manage to spare dear Steven, at all events? She managed it; dear Steven acquiescing only too readily; and before many days were over was classed by the world in precisely the same rank with her precedents, Mrs. D——, and Madame C——, and little Lady B——; light, ball-going young women, with more or less of

character between them all, and with husbands too indifferent or too large-minded to heed the lateness of their wives' hours.

Katharine Fane had said rightly that Steven was too straightforward, too simple of heart to suspect evil in others; but, unhappily, this very straightforwardness, this very simplicity, rendered him the most unsuited of all guides for a woman like Dora. A man of the world might have given her a reasonable degree of freedom, and yet have held her in wholesome fear as well. To Steven, in this as in everything, there was no medium course. If his wife chose to go her own road once, she might go! For married women—dressed as women under the empire do dress—to waltz through the midnight hours in their husbands' absence, seemed to him one degree less shameful than for them to do so in their husband's sight. The first time that he ever saw Dot ball-clad and waltzing, he underwent a feeling of mingled disgust, indignation, and abasement—a feeling for which I scarce, indeed, know how to find a fitting name. After that night, with or without his presence, smiling upon Mr. Clarendon Whyte or upon another, or upon a score of others, he felt that it could matter little to him. Dora had lost her prestige, the ineffable bloom of decent womanhood with which his imagination had invested her: let it pass! She was not, would never be again, what he had once thought her, yet was no worse, he told himself, than other women of the world; was frivolous and pleasure-seeking; about as good a companion for him, Steven Lawrence (Lord Petres' words verified already) as a gilded butterfly would have been, but had loved him enough to become his wife, and so merited in-

finite forbearance,—infinite patience at his hands! He was, as he had said, a man capable of being jealous once, and only once. He might feel humiliated, confessing to himself that his humiliation was the result of ignorance, at seeing his wife among the crowd of a Parisian ball-room. Small doubts, small fears, small suspicions could have no place in Steven's breast. Poor little Dora was taking her pleasure now, to fortify herself against the inevitable years to come at Ashcot; and to himself the dressing and the enamelling and the dancing of fashionable ladies was repugnant, like his dinners, like his lodgings, like everything, in short, that belonged to this artificial city life. But only four more weeks of it remained! four more weeks and he would be back in England, working on his farm, breathing pure country air, sometimes seeing Katharine's face. Oh, for some way to make these interminable thirty days pass quicker!

A man of seven-and-twenty, of keen excitement-craving temperament, companionless in Paris, not without money in his pockets, and seeking desperately, but in vain, to make the time pass. To this singularly anomalous pass had Steven Lawrence's life now arrived.

CHAPTER X.

Mademoiselle Barry.

It was his habit to rise early; even in these January mornings was often dressed and abroad in the twilight Champs Elysées or dusky streets before eight o'clock. At eleven, after a three hours' walk, he would come home to breakfast, at which meal his wife, if not too

tired, appeared in dressing-gown and crimping pins, her face white (more sightly so in Steven's eyes than with the finer complexion it assumed towards noon), her eyes dark and hollow, her hands skaky, her heart and soul occupied with last night's conquests and to-day's projects; all of which, with discreet reservations, she poured forth, not unamusingly, into her husband's ears as she sipped her chocolate. After breakfast generally arrived the milliner, hairdresser, dressmaker, or other finery factor for rehearsal of to-night's performance, or this afternoon's, or this morning's—Dora was sufficiently advanced now to require at the least four elaborate changes of dress a day—and then the master of the establishment perforce must turn out again into the streets.

The apartment that, as Dot would say, "had been sufficient for the Honourable Augustus Dynevor and his wife," was an undeniable apartment as far as situation went; an apartment rich in carved cornices and brackets—against which Steven, being inconveniently tall, knocked his head: also in Utrecht velvets, ormolu, and mirrors. "A bijou of an apartment," it was described in the lists of Messrs. Arthur and Webb; possessing indeed only the trifling drawback that neither fresh air nor light could enter the two six-foot square dungeons called bed-rooms. To fresh air Mrs. Lawrence was as beautifully indifferent as to most other natural phenomena; but light, and strong light is imperatively needful for toilette-tables of the second empire; and so, "just till midday, just till anybody was likely to call, *would* dear Steven mind being out?" thus allowing M. Alphonse, the hairdresser, or Mademoiselle Aglaë, the work-girl, the use of the salon. He

turned out, whatever the weather, with perfect cheerfulness; often before he went, poor big Steven! would be bidden to hold a satin in these folds, or a velvet in that light, while Dot retired, as far as the limited space would allow, to form artistic judgment of its effects. Then commenced the daily task of time-killing; the daily weary walks in which, with the inevitable lack of interest of an uneducated man, he would traverse Paris from one end to the other, and find it all blank. No deeper significance than stones and cement in the palaces, no pathos in the grey old churches, no heart-stirring history in these imperial boulevards replacing the old streets where the carmagnole was danced, the *ça ira* sung, and where a king and queen once passed along upon the tumbril to die! All was blank to Steven Lawrence, just as a picture is blank to a child's intelligence until its meaning has been pointed out by some one better taught than himself. Paris was a vast mart of expensive toys, he saw; toys through which it was his present lot to walk with closed pockets and averted eyes, but of which his wife, in the millinery department, might take her fill. A mart in which it was his portion to wander unoccupied from morning till night, seeking to kill the implacable enemy that every day grew more vital, with home interludes of barbers and dressmakers, scandal in which he took no interest, and gold powdering, dressing, enamelling, and general rehearsing for a world in whose scenes he bore, and wished to bear, no part.

His favourite resting-place of a forenoon, when it happened neither to rain nor snow, and when even his stout limbs grew tired of ceaseless pacing along the pavement, was the Luxembourg Gardens. He never

felt so little in Paris as when he sat down there under the leafless chestnuts, smoking (he smoked ten hours a day now) in the morning sunshine, and with only children and nurses, an occasional priest, book in hand, or slow-paced grey old pensioner to break the solitude. And so to the sunny Luxembourg one sunny forenoon, destined to begin an episode of some importance in his life, Steven Lawrence went; sat down on his accustomed bench; lit his cigar, and began to think—of Ashcot and Katharine, and how to-day, Wednesday, she and the Squire would be riding to the meet, and if the weather at home was like this, what a day for hunting it would be, with the sun breaking the night's thin frost, and a blue sky already sprinkled with promising fleecy clouds over-head!

. . . . "Kate, my child," said a man's voice, in English but with a curious half-foreign, half-Irish accent; "are you sure now that it's not too cold for you to be sitting down?"

Steven started, his heart set beating in a moment, and saw, not his—I mean not Lord Petres'—Kate, but a pale, poorly-dressed little girl of nineteen or twenty, in the act of sitting down by him on the bench, and with an elderly man, evidently from the likeness between them her father, on her other side.

"It isn't too cold for me, papa," she said, in one of those fresh flute-like voices that, if you are fortunate, you may come across three or four times in your life; and then Steven turned his head, irresistibly attracted, and looked at her full.

The girl was not handsome, still less pretty, yet hers was a face few men could pass unnoticed even amidst the meretricious beauty, the fine complexions

and bright-hued locks of the Champs Elysées or the boulevards. The pale cheeks, the brown hair drawn straight off the temples, the plain little bonnet, the well-worn black silk frock, all told of a woman shunning rather than courting attention. And still you were forced to attend to her! to remark that she had a slender foot and hand; a graceful tread; that the dress, however poor, was exquisitely clean and modest—in fine, that something more than beauty drew a sharp line of demarcation between her and the crowd of women amongst whom she walked. She looked with a pair of deep-set grey eyes straight up at Steven. He felt as if she had spoken to him; took his cigar from his lips and flung it away.

“Pray don’t let us disturb you, sir,” said the father, looking round and slightly raising his hat. “My little daughter is not very strong, and I chose this bench for her to be in the sun; but pray don’t leave off smoking or we shall feel that we have disturbed you.”

The tone would have been that of a well-bred man, had it not been just a shade more polite, more apologetic than the occasion required. But Steven, never hypercritical, was glad of the sound of an English voice, and in a few minutes’ time found himself talking, or rather listening while the stranger talked, about all the current gossip of Paris: The Emperor’s last race-horse, and the Empress’s last carriage, the increasing price of apartments, and the new piece that was to be brought out at the Opéra Comique—the usual innocuous gossip with which Englishmen abroad are forced to supplant our national staple of politics and weather as material for small-talk.

“Well, I have no doubt that Paris, for people with

town tastes, is all that you say," said Steven at last, the stranger having given his opinion as to the superiority of Paris over every other European city. "For myself, I speak openly, I've never been so tired of my life as during these few weeks I've spent here. Bricks and mortar don't concern me. I find more to look at in a forest or prairie than in all the palaces and show-places that were ever built."

A quiet little smile came round the corners of the girl's lips. "Do you see nothing interesting in the show-place we are sitting under?" she said, glancing up over her shoulder at the grey walls of the Luxembourg.

"Nothing at all," answered Steven. "It's a fine building—so are the Madeleine and the Bourse, and when you have seen one, you have seen all of them. In a prairie—in an English turnip-field—you will find life, of one sort or another, and change. In palaces and churches you have dead bricks and mortar, nothing more."

"And all that the bricks and mortar, all that this old Luxembourg must have looked on at when your prairies and fields were—just what they are to-day, and will be till the end of the world! Why," the girl's eyes kindled, "I think one can hardly look up at those windows above us without seeing the prisoners' eager white faces crowding there—the prisoners, don't you remember, who heard the tocsin and saw men wave to them from the housetops, but didn't know whether Robespierre's downfall was to mean their deliverance or their death?"

Steven was silent. He had learned French history at school—for Joshua Lawrence always conscientiously

bade the master give him as good an education as could be got for money—but at this lapse of time had grown uncertain about names and dates. Joan of Arc he remembered, and St. Bartholomew's massacre; but who was Robespierre? and had the tocsin sounded a hundred years ago or yesterday?

"My little daughter is wonderfully fond of these dry subjects," said the father, in his suave manner. "I assure you there is scarcely a street or building in Paris she doesn't tell me some quaint history about as we walk along. We live quietly, you see, sir, and her time is spent wholly at her books or pencil, or in walking with me. Now if—if it would pass an hour to you to take a stroll with us sometimes, as you don't seem to have overmuch to do with your time?"

The proposal by most men would have been held an equivocal one; but Steven accepted it without the faintest detrimental suspicion of his new friends. He had been accustomed, in the backwoods, to see acquaintances formed without letters of introduction, generally without men knowing or seeking to know each other's names, and it did not occur to him that greater circumspection was usual in the life of civilization. The girl meanwhile sat dead-silent, her hands clasped together on her lap, and looking straight away through the long vistas of the leafless chesnuts.

"It's the fashion for Englishmen abroad to hold aloof from each other as if each was a convicted felon," said the father, with a pleasant smile (he was a handsome, elderly man, with grey beard and hair, wonderfully white even teeth, and palish hazel eyes, of an indefinite expression—an expression not quite as genial as his smile and manner); "but I have lived too long

on the Continent to keep up many of our insular prejudices. If I talk to a countryman and like him, I want no other introduction. Now, where are you staying?"

Steven told him: also his name.

"Lawrence? dear me, one of the best fellows I ever knew was called Lawrence. We were like brothers together in the Crimea—I have gone through my little bit of fighting in my day, you see! Your name is spelt?—ah, to be sure, with a 'w.' His, poor fellow, was with a 'u,' so there can be no relationship. Champs Elysées, you say? Best situation in Paris. Now we live in a most unfashionable quarter of the town—obliged, alas! to be economical. Kate, child, have you a card of mine about you?"

"I have not, papa," said the girl, in the same flute-like voice, but with a cold, distant manner, that contrasted singularly with the ultra geniality of the man.

"Well—stay, let me see," searching within the pockets of his shabby surtout, in the button-hole of which Steven, for the first time, remarked that he wore a little bit of red ribbon. "Yes, as luck will have it, I have got my card-case. Monsieur Barry, Mademoiselle Barry." And as he spoke he took a card from a well-worn leathern case, and handed it to Steven. "One hundred and five, Rue des Ursulines. You turn away to the left as you go from the Luxembourg, and cross the Boulevard de Sebastopol. Our lodging is on the third floor of a corner house immediately facing the Rue St.-Jacques."

Steven put the card into his pocket, but volunteered no offer of calling; and then, the girl still remaining ab-

solutely silent, the father went on again: "Our name, as you will remark, is Irish, but we have lived abroad until we are 'Monsieur' and 'Mademoiselle' even among our English acquaintances. I may say, indeed, we look upon ourselves more as French than English now, don't we, Kate?"

"I believe so, papa."

"Most of our friends are foreigners—but really we live the quietest of lives. I take my girl (she and I are alone in the world, sir) to the theatre sometimes, and twice a week, Wednesday and Saturday, in our little way," said M. Barry, with bland humility, "we receive. Three or four friends come in, that is to say, to smoke a cigar, and play a rubber or a quiet round game. If such a humdrum way of spending your evening would be agreeable to you, we should be very glad—Katie, my dear, we should be very glad if Mr. Lawrence would give us the pleasure of his company at one of your grand receptions. Let me see, this is Wednesday; well, if you have no better engagement, will you come round to our lodgings to-night?"

Mademoiselle Barry lifted her eyes for the second time to Steven's: the steady, dark-grey eyes that nullified whatever likeness the rest of her face bore to her father's. "Our grand receptions are not very much amusement to me," and as she said this she smiled; and Steven thought her more than handsome. "I don't smoke, and I don't play cards—"

"But you are very glad to find some one to talk to you while we old gentlemen doze over our rubber," interrupted M. Barry, quickly, and rising from the bench as he spoke. "Mr. Lawrence, I don't know what you say, but I find it too chilly to remain sitting.

I suppose you have not time to take a stroll with us through the gardens?"

Mr. Lawrence had plenty of time, and the walk was lengthened out until long past noon; finally ended in their wandering for a couple of hours together through the gallery of the Luxembourg—hours in which Steven first learned to look at pictures with a dim sense of their being something more than painted canvas, framed and ranged on walls. He came home less wearied than he had ever felt after Parisian sight-seeing yet; and at ten o'clock that evening started, as soon as he had seen Dora into her carriage, towards the distant Rue des Ursulines, to attend Mademoiselle Barry's "reception."

"My husband, of his own free will, gone off to a party!" chatters Dot, in the intervals of her first quadrille with Clarendon Whyte; for Steven had told his little adventure in all integrity to his wife. "A party given by some charming people he picked up in the Luxembourg Gardens—an old gentleman friendly enough to ask strangers, whose name he doesn't know, to his house, and a daughter who seems to be a kind of walking guide-book, with wonderful grey eyes, and a voice like a nightingale; a much more fascinating person, evidently, than poor little me!"

Upon which Mr. Clarendon Whyte bends and whispers some bit of flattery, neither very brilliant nor very original, but which serves its purpose—sends a thrill of conscious vanity through the shallow, passionless heart of Steven's wife.

The Barry's apartment was on the third floor of an hotel in one of the quietest quarters of the town, an apartment wanting in ormolu and velvet, but open and

airy; more habitable far, thought Steven as he entered, than Dora's mousetrap entresol in the best situation in Paris. He was late: M. Barry, turning round from the card-table, rallied him as he came in about his fashionable hours; and such guests as were coming to the "reception" (four or five Frenchmen, none of them in evening dress) were already assembled. Mademoiselle Barry, alone at a little table by the fireside, was drawing. The lamp, placed close at her left hand, the methodical arrangement of her pencils and papers, the silence of the room, the faces of the men around the card-table, gave Steven—he knew not why—an idea that the scene was an habitual one in the girl's life. He went up to her at once, and she put down her pencil, and bade him, with a friendly enough smile, take a chair at her side.

"I needn't interrupt you," said Steven, looking over her work. "Go on with your drawing. I should like to watch you."

"But I can't draw when I'm watched," said Mademoiselle Barry, "and I am so tired that I am glad to stop. After all you were forced to go through in the Luxembourg," she added, "I shouldn't think you wanted anything more in the shape of pictures to-day."

"I 'went through' what gave me pleasure," said Steven, in his frank way. "This morning made me feel that, if I was ever so little better educated, I might get to like pictures—after a fashion of my own. Let me look at your drawing, please. Why, what is it done on—wood? I thought people drew on canvas or card-board, or tackle of that kind."

"People who draw for money draw on the tackle

their masters bid them use," said Mademoiselle Barry, smiling a little smile to herself at the Englishman's ignorance. "I'm not a young-lady artist, sir. I make money, good gold pieces of twenty francs, by my drawings. This sketch will appear publicly as one of the chef-d'œuvres of the 'Journal de la Rive gauche' a week or two hence. You don't read the 'Journal de la Rive gauche,' I suppose? It is, I must tell you, one of the poorest Paris papers of one sou. Well, if you did, you would recognise my drawing there—not by the sketch itself; all likeness to the original will be too thoroughly taken away in the cutting—but by the letters 'K.B.' Do you see them in the corner here?"

The scene which the drawing represented was of a character thoroughly suited to the paper for which it was destined: a young man reeling, pistol in hand, from a gambling room; glimpses of players around the table within: the outline of a female figure, her arms wildly extended, as if to clasp him, in the black night outside—a scene melodramatic in conception, faulty in design, but drawn with exquisite fineness of touch, and not without originality and true artistic feeling in the expression and gestures of the principal actors.

"Why, this scene must surely have been taken from life," said Steven, when he had examined the block carefully. "I remember seeing one like it, or nearly like it, years ago in Sacramento. Surely," he went on, "a drawing such as this is worthy of a place in something better than—"

"A halfpenny Paris paper!" said Mademoiselle Barry, quickly. "No, indeed, it is not. There isn't such a thing, I hold, as underrated talent. We all

find exactly the place in the world"—but as she said this she sighed—"exactly the place that we are most suited to fill. When first I began to draw—come and sit by the fire, please; so long as we talk low we may talk—when I first thought of drawing for money, that is to say, about two years ago, I had a great opinion of myself. Because I could understand good pictures, and was fond of them, and had a pretty young-lady touch, I thought I was an artist!"

She smiled—the pensive flitting smile that became her delicate face so well. "If people have an overweening opinion of their own ability," she went on, as Steven remained silent, "let them try to make money by it. No test so sure, sir. I sent over my first sketches to the——, well, to one of the best magazines in London. I knew nothing of English magazines, but the clerk of the English library—we lived at Brussels then—told me it was one of the best, and for two months heard nothing of them. Then I wrote to inquire. 'The sketches of K. B.,' I heard in three lines of reply, 'were wholly valueless to the——. It was feared they were mislaid. The risk of miscarriage was always, as K. B. probably knew, incurred by the sender.'"

"And after this?" asked Steven, interested for the first time in his life in any venture of art or literature.

"After this," said Mademoiselle Barry, "we came to Paris, and I tried some of the first-class French papers, with the same success. At last an artist who looked over a sketch I was making in the Louvre one day told me I must draw on the wood with my own hand if I wanted to get money from the journals. I

learnt wood-drawing—I mean, I taught myself how to do it—and, bit by bit, have risen to my present position. The ‘Journal du Rive gauche’ will give me twenty francs, at least, for this block, and twenty francs to me is a good deal.”

Steven glanced round involuntarily at the card table, where gold pieces were circulating pretty freely through M. Barry’s well-shaped hands in the course of the friendly round game.

“Oh, papa does not like my drawing for money,” said the girl, as if she had guessed his thoughts. “He can’t understand, perhaps you will not, the pleasure I have in possessing money that has been earned by myself, not by—not by my father putting it into my hand, you know!”

Just as she was speaking, the clock on the mantelpiece struck twelve. M. Barry looked round, and the girl rose in a second, and passed, with her graceful noiseless tread, into an adjoining room. She came back a minute or two later bearing a small tray of refreshments, set it down in silence on a table near the players, then returned to Steven. After standing for a few moments gazing down intently into the flickering wood-fire, “Mr. Lawrence,” she said, not in a whisper, but in the kind of compressed voice more difficult than any whisper to overhear, “do you ever play cards? I hope not. It is a pleasant way of spending time, no doubt; my father is very fond of cards, as you see; but—but unless people are very lucky—and luck is so capricious! they generally end by losing an *awful* deal of money, I think.”

“Like the hero in your sketch,” answered Steven unsuspectingly. “Well, now, I’ll tell you exactly how

I feel about cards. I must either not play at all, or play too much. Cards themselves don't amuse me, but I'm ready, only too ready, to be carried away by the excitement of winning or losing, and, as I have no money to spare, the wisest thing is for me never to touch a card at all."

He spoke in a tone every word of which was loud enough to reach the ears of the players; but the players seemed all of them too engrossed to attend to anything beyond their game. At the end of another quarter of an hour, Steven and Mademoiselle Barry still talking together by the fire, there was a move, and one of the Frenchmen, with profuse apologies for breaking up the table so soon, rose to go. He was a little old man, dressed in a dark-blue uniform, with a bit of yellow ribbon at his button-hole, and was addressed by the remainder of the party as "Chevalier."

"And we all leave off much as we began," said M. Barry, carelessly turning over a small heap of gold pieces at his side. "You, Chevalier, a little bit better off than the rest of us. Twenty minutes past twelve only!" This, as the Chevalier, with a profound salutation to Mademoiselle Barry, left the room. "Kate, my dear, you are close to the clock—is it really only twenty minutes past twelve?"

"That is the time, papa."

"Well, then, what do you say, messieurs?" turning to his other guests. "Shall we go on for an hour or so more, or not?"

One of the men answered something in French, glancing as he spoke at Steven.

"Ah," said M. Barry, speaking in English, "it would be a bad compliment to ask our friend to join

us so late in the evening. You wouldn't care to take the Chevalier's place for an hour, I suppose, Mr. Lawrence? We play a humdrum round game, just to while away the time, as you see, and you young men are all so accustomed to high play. Now, don't say 'yes' out of good nature!"

Steven hesitated.

"Come and have a glass of wine before we begin, at all events," said M. Barry, rising. "Katie, my love, come to the table and have some wine. You look tired."

The girl obeyed him instantly, as she always obliged him in everything: drank a glass of claret, ate some fruit, then, in her pretty quiet way, stood chatting to the three or four dingy Frenchmen of whom her "reception" consisted, while M. Barry talked, with ever-increasing friendliness of manner, to Steven. "You don't care to take a hand, I see," he remarked at last. "Be frank—'twill only be for an hour; but I don't like in my own house to break up the game."

"Well, if I am really wanted, I'll play," said Steven, hesitatingly; but as he spoke he approached the card-table; "that is to say, if I understand the game you are playing at."

"We play lansquenet," said one of the Frenchmen, in broken English. "Quite easy play—you learn him in tree minute. See, I play ze valet," taking up a pack of cards to further his explanation, "and ze dame. Your money is for ze dame. I turn, turn—là! You gain." Extending the fingers of both hands, as if to show by pantomime the ease with which he would be despoiled of his money by the Englishman's superior luck.

"Ah, I believe I know something about it," said Steven, taking the Chevalier's vacant chair: he had played lansquenet a good many dozen times at Havestock. "Only in England we call it lansquenette."

"Lansquenet,—lansquenette,—mais c'est la même chose," cried M. Barry, who seldom seemed to remember whether he was speaking English or French. "The stupidest game in the world, as a game;" confidentially this to Steven; "but you never can get Frenchmen to play at anything else, except baccarat. Whist is too slow for them; loo they detest." Then, turning to the other players, all of whom had now resumed their places, M. Barry introduced his guests to each other formally, and the little round game went on.

Mademoiselle Barry returned to the fire-side, seated herself in an arm-chair, with her back to the players, and never looked round until an hour, or an hour and a half later, when the game broke up. The moment the men rose from the table the French habitués of the house bowed themselves away, and Steven, coming up to Mademoiselle Barry, began to wish her good-night.

"No, no, no, Lawrence!" cried M. Barry, running back from the door, where he had been seeing his friends out, and putting his hand on Steven's arm. "Stop, and have half an hour's chat and a friendly cigar with me. You haven't been very much bored with our quiet evening, I hope? Then you must come next Saturday—come as long as you are in Paris. You lost a little, I'm afraid?"

"On the contrary," said Steven; "I won four or five pounds, at least."

"Did you, indeed? I thought de Vitrou won—as much, that is to say, as was lost. We play, as you

see, very moderately. I scarcely remember winning or losing more than a couple of hundred francs myself in one evening, for months past."

Mademoiselle Barry looked up quickly at her father's face. "Ah," said M. Barry, without giving her time to speak, "my daughter thinks two hundred francs a frightfully heavy sum, poor little Katie! and so it is, to us. She doesn't remember a mother's care, Lawrence. From the time she was so high, she has managed—tried, rather, to manage—my nomadic house-keeping for me. A life spent in great continental cities without mother or sister is a terribly lonely one for a girl; but as much as I can, I make myself her companion."

He put his arm tenderly round her thin little figure, and drew her to his side. "And how have you passed your evening, child? Wearied with the sight of old gentlemen and card-playing, as usual?"

"I wasn't wearied at all while Mr. Lawrence talked to me," answered the girl, with perfect frankness. "As soon as he touched the cards I was alone again, and I never feel very weary when I am alone."

"As soon as a man touches cards you look upon him as lost, Katie, don't you?" said M. Barry. "It is a symptom of old-fogyism quite unpardonable in your sight. Nothing really pleases my little girl, sir, but wandering through churches and picture-galleries of a morning, and working herself blind, as you have seen, over her wood-drawing of an evening. Her only dissipation, poor child, is the theatre. We are going there to-morrow night, by-the-bye, to hear this new thing they are bringing out at the Opéra Comique. You have heard it, of course?"

"It would be impossible for me to tell you what I have heard," said Steven; "I have been taken, I know, to most of the theatres in Paris, but——"

"If one doesn't care for music, what a toil of pleasure it is," interrupted M. Barry; "especially if you have not a thorough knowledge of the language. Now, I was just going to propose that you should accompany us to-morrow. We go in a very humble fashion—walk to the theatre, my daughter in her morning-dress, take our places in an obscure part of the house, and when we have had enough, come away. Such a way of passing the evening would be martyrdom to you, no doubt?"

"On the contrary," answered Steven, "it is the only way in which, if I could choose, I should ever go to the theatre myself."

"Then you had better come with us, I think," said Mademoiselle Barry, raising her eyes for a moment to his face.

And this was how Steven's apprenticeship to lansquenet and baccarat was brought about.

CHAPTER XI.

Monsieur Valentin's Sketch.

"You can't deny, my dear Steven, that you are always with these people. I hear of it from everybody. You have been seen with them in all sorts of places: picture-galleries, churches, theatres even, and by your own account you spend your evenings at

their house. Now, I have no small jealousy. No," said Dot, loftily, "my maxim is, perfect confidence, perfect freedom in married life; but what I say is, a husband who amuses himself as you do has no right—no right, Steven, to interfere with his wife in any way."

"And I," answered Steven, "differ from you entirely. I spend my mornings in walking about with the Barrys. I go there sometimes of an evening, and shall continue to do so during the short time we stay in Paris. And I don't choose you to go to this masked ball. It's the first thing I have forbidden you to do yet, Dora, and I insist upon your obeying me."

"Insist? Because of the expense, or what you believe will be the expense, I conclude?"

"On the contrary," answered Steven, "expense is a subject I have long ceased to think about as far as you are concerned."

"As far as I am concerned!" cried Mrs. Lawrence, firing. "I like that. I lose all the money at baccarat and écarté, I suppose? I am pointed out, by half Paris, as the associate of a set of notorious, disreputable card-sharpers."

"Not card-sharpers!" said Steven, calmly. "I don't think the people you spend your time with particularly reputable; but I know no reason why they should be accounted card-sharpers."

"A great deal more than can be said for your companions!" cried Dot, wisely declining the defence of her own friends. "I speak much more in sorrow than in anger, Steven, and I think it my positive duty to tell you that M. Barry is looked upon among the

English as a common blackleg. His accomplice—one of his accomplices, rather—is an old man they call the chevalier. The chevalier, and three or four other Frenchmen of the same stamp, play at his house twice a week—you see, I have heard all about it—nominally winning and losing money among themselves; and then, of course, when they get any poor simpleton well into the net, they divide the spoils. There are Englishmen now in Paris who remember Barry in Florence, in Monaco, in Brussels. He lives by his wits, by his dexterous fingers, I should say: just remains in a place until he has plucked a sufficient number of pigeons, or until the police are down upon him, and then goes away, nobody knows where, his daughter, if she is his daughter, with him.”

Steven had kept his temper admirably hitherto; but at his wife's last words the blood rose in an angry flush across his face. “M. Barry may or may not be what you say, Dora. Until such accusations are brought openly against a man I, for my part, would never think of listening to them behind his back. As for Mademoiselle Barry——”

“As for Mademoiselle Barry? Pray, don't hesitate, my dear!”

“She is the first quiet, decent woman it has been my chance to come across in Paris,” said Steven, with deliberation; “and I have found rest and pleasure in her society. I'm not, I never shall be, up to the mark of the world you like to live in, Dora. The truth must be told some day between us! You took me to your balls, and I saw women dressed—that I should use the word—as no honest man in my class of life would ever see his wife or sister dress; with painted

lips and cheeks, with dishevelled hair, nakedness on their shoulders, immodesty in their eyes——”

“Steven!”

“And I felt a pang—well, you’d never understand *what* I felt, child, on first seeing you among them. Ridiculous, quite! I know all you would say. A woman of the world must dress and dance, and be like others. So you told me, Dora, you remember?”

“I do, sir; and I remember you told me that you were ignorant—you confessed it then—ignorant of the ways of civilized people, and that you would not seek to make me adopt your absurd old-fashioned notions.”

“I don’t ask you to adopt them now. You have had freedom enough, God knows!” said Steven, “and have been to balls enough, and spent money, and lived fast enough in every way, without my opposing you. At this masked ball I make a stand. You shall not go to it! The matter is settled.” And he rose, and began searching about for his hat among the heaps of silk and velvet that, as usual, filled up every chair and table of the small room.

“Oh, but the matter is not settled,” cried Dot. “You needn’t take up your hat: your *friends* must wait for you to-day. After what you have said—the cruel, the infamous things you have said of my acquaintances! women received—yes, received by the world, Steven, I choose to speak openly, too. This Mademoiselle Barry, who you say is the first decent person you have spoken to in Paris, is looked upon by every one simply as an accomplice of the man’s. How did they first get to know you? Would any respectable man introduce his daughter to an utter stranger, picked up

in the Luxembourg Gardens? I don't—I *can't* stoop to suspecting you of really caring for such society; but I do say, that in appearing openly with a person like Mademoiselle Barry you outrage public opinion and me."

Then Steven turned, and looked down full on his wife's face—the small face smaller than ever after its manifold midnight vigils, worn and sickly-hued now that no rouge concealed it! 'And all the manliness of his nature forbade him, as it had forbidden him that night of her first victory at Ashcot, to contend with a thing so weak. "Dora, my dear, you speak like a child. I was wrong to be vexed with you. You only repeated what some empty-headed fool has told you of Mademoiselle Barry. She an accomplice! she one of a band of card-sharpers! I have committed an outrage on public opinion by being seen with her!" Steven laughed aloud. "A little simple-minded girl, who lets me walk beside her through these galleries and show-places, and teaches me—I want it bad enough—who lived here, and who died there, and what this picture means, and the rest of it."

"And lansquenet and écarté of an evening? Is that another branch of Mademoiselle Barry's tuition?"

"Mademoiselle Barry detests cards," said Steven, shortly. "If I had followed her advice I should never have touched a card in her father's house. The moment play begins she turns her back upon us, sits down to her drawing—I've told you before how she works at those blocks of hers—and never looks round again until the table breaks up."

"I see,—*rôle d'ingénue*,—exactly what I was told. Steven, to come from sentiment to fact, how many

good solid Napoleons have you lost since you made the acquaintance of your friend M. Barry, and his intellectual, simple-minded daughter?"

Steven did not at once reply.

"You can answer, at least!" cried Dot. The question is a fair one, I'm sure! How much of our money has already made its way into the Barrys' pockets?"

"Well, on the whole," said Steven, "I believe I must have lost about thirty pounds. Till three days ago I had won—won considerably, but on Saturday night the luck certainly went dead against me. So you see, my dear, I have no secrets. I tell you everything!" And he stooped and drew her kindly (not kissing her: the battalions of hair-pins, the powders, the unguents which surrounded Dora of a morning did not encourage these old-fashioned amenities of domestic life) to his side.

"Does Mademoiselle Barry know you are a married man, Steven?"

"I—I suppose so," he answered. "I have never thought it necessary to talk to the Barrys about my own affairs."

"And you tell me, on your very honour, you are not a bit Oh! Steven, you are not a bit in love with her?"

"I don't think you ought to ask me such a question, Dora."

"But I do ask it! and I do expect you to give me an answer, sir!"

"Well, then, as you will have it, poor little Mademoiselle Barry is the last woman I should ever think of in that kind of way, even if I could 'fall in love,' as you call it, with anybody now!"

"Am I to take that as a personal compliment, I wonder?"

"Take it as the plain truth, child. You know well enough I never try to pay you compliments."

She put one small hand under her husband's arm, clasped it with the other, and so stood, meditative, for some moments. "How glad I am we have had all this out!" she cried, at last. "How foolish I was not to speak before! You have quite satisfied me about these poor, virtuous, slandered Barrys (only don't lose any more thirty pounds than you can help, for the future, my big goose), and—ah! Steven, you *can't* refuse me now about this ball! Every one is going," went on Dot, not giving him time to speak, "Grizelda Long, Lady B——, all the people I know. You can come yourself to mount dragon over me, if you will, dear! It will be almost my last—think of that! my last party in Paris. Don't refuse me."

"Don't force me to refuse you," said Steven. "You know very well what I have said already. Don't force me to repeat it."

"Steven," cried Dot, both hands clasped round his arm, and looking up entreatingly into his face; "if you won't let me accept this invitation, at least give me your reasons for declining it? You have never said a word about my going to other balls; why mustn't I go to this? How can a masked ball—a fancy ball rather; half the people won't wear masks—be worse than any other? Can a dress of Louis Quinze or of the First Empire," said Dot, with unconscious irony, "be less decorous than one of the present day?"

"Hardly, I must admit," answered Steven. "Still, some of these costumes do outrival even what I saw in

your Parisian ball-rooms!" And he pointed to a dozen or so of milliners' pictures that were lying in a heap beside Dora's work-case on the table.

"And you have been judging of a bal costumé by these ridiculous engravings?" cried Mrs. Lawrence. "A set of old-fashioned stupidities that some one, Grizelda Long I think, left here yesterday! No doubt there are all sorts of outrageous costumes to be found among them—theatrical costumes, who knows? But do you *think* I would appear in one of them, in anything that was not the perfection of good taste? Now, Steven, I don't argue, I don't wish to oppose you, but will you, just to please me, let me show you the little dress that, if you did relent, and if I did go, I would wear?"

She made him, whether he would or no, sit down again; disappeared for a minute into her bedroom; then returned, holding something out of sight behind her, came and knelt down at his feet.

"The ball, as you know, my dear Steven, is given by Lady Sarah Adair."

"I know," said Steven. "That fact alone sets me against it. Why doesn't Lady Sarah Adair live with her husband?"

"Because he is a monster!" answered Dora, promptly. "A horrible half-witted creature (she only married him for his money, poor girl!) And he beats her—yes, Steven, beats her, and throws her downstairs when he is not sober, and the doctors sent the Lord Chancellor a certificate to say her life would be endangered by remaining with him, and——"

"And so she forgets her sorrows by living alone

in Paris, and giving masked balls!" interrupted Steven.

"She lives well thought of by every one; has an old lady—is it her aunt, or his aunt? well, some one's aunt—as chaperon; and invites all kinds of artists and celebrities, quite the sort of society you would like, to her house. To walk through this ball, they say, will be like walking through a gallery of historical portraits. There are to be groups illustrative of the different periods, each person dressed by artists for the part to which he is best suited. Now—now shall I show you my costume, Steven? It has been designed by a celebrated painter who knows me by sight, and Lady Sarah will be in despair at losing me. Not another full-grown person in Paris could fill the character, they say, but me. Will you see it?"

"Show me anything you choose, my dear."

"Well here, then!" Dot produced a coloured engraving. "Here, I must tell you, is the model for Marie de Medicis. What do you think of it?" And she leaned across, still holding something concealed in her left hand, to point out the beauties of the costume to Steven's ignorant eyes. "A crimson velvet stomacher, embroidered with pearls, you see; pearls on the throat and wrists; white silk train, all worked in richest crimson and gold."

"I see," said Steven; "a tawdry, strolling-actor affair to my taste, but suited, no doubt, to a woman about as tall as I am, and stout in proportion."

"Exactly, exactly!" cried Dot; "that dress is for Lady Sarah herself, who, as you know, poor dear, is one of the unwieldiest women in Paris. Lady Sarah is to be Marie de Medicis, and for me—ah! Steven—

for me is reserved the sweetest, most piquant little dress of the ball, Marie de Medicis' page or train-bearer." Saying which she produced another picture, an artist's sketch this, artistically coloured, and bearing a strong likeness to herself in the face; and put it, after a slight preliminary show of hesitation, into Steven's hand.

"Doublet of sky-blue silk, you see, dearest; little hanging cloak of blue velvet; velvet cap; white plume; tiny rapier in the belt; white satin——great heavens, Steven!" cried Dot, starting away as she chanced to look from the picture to her husband's face, "what is the matter with you?"

"You—you want to go in this dress to a ball?" said Steven, each word coming from his lips with dry measured emphasis. "You could endure to have men's eyes upon you—you, a married woman, thirty years of age—in a dress like this?"

"I think before you insult me in that way you should remember what you are saying!" But, as she spoke, Dot rose to her feet, and shrunk away from him, frightened. "People much better than us go to balls in page-costume. Lady Alicia Hall went in that same character last year, and—and it's very ungenerous in you, Steven, to taunt me about my age. The costume is looked upon by everybody as the perfection of good taste, and M. Valentin, one of the most rising artists in Paris, drew it expressly to suit me."

"Did he?" was Steven's answer. "Then you can write word to Lady Sarah Adair at once, that you will not attend her ball. Say, if you want an excuse, that you believe your husband will have taken you home to his farm before the day arrives. Monsieur Valentin's

sketch I treat—as you ought to have done when it was first put into your hands!” And Steven tore the sketch across into six, eight pieces; then, deliberately, without passion, laid the fragments down in a little pile upon the table.

Dora stood for a minute horror struck, aghast; then she burst out into a flood of tears. “I would rather, much, you had struck me!” she cried, her great dark eyes flaming out from her small face. “If you had kept me from the ball I should at least have had the picture of my toilette to look at! could have made believe to myself, almost, when I’m back in your horrid Ashcot, that I had worn it. It was drawn for me—it was my portrait—half Paris knows Monsieur Valentin drew it for me. Oh, I hate you—I hate you!”

She set her teeth; she stamped with her little foot. An injustice regarding millinery had, as you have seen, been the unpardonable wrong done her in her youth. Millinery still was the one human interest that could wring genuine feeling, genuine passion, from what shallow depths she possessed of soul. “You are big and strong, and you think, now you have me in your power, you can treat me—as you treated that wretched man, whom you turned out of your house at Clithero to starve! But I’m not afraid of you! I’ll write and tell Uncle Frank of your violence. What right had you to destroy my poor little picture! my own property, drawn on purpose for me, and coloured so bright and pretty, and—and real gold dust on the hair!” said Dot, with choking voice.

“I had the best right in the world to destroy it,” answered Steven. “The right of a husband who does

not choose that his wife should forget her own self-respect, or to see her represented in a dress which, I believe, many a common play-actress would have the decency to blush for having worn. Write to your uncle, child: describe the dress you wanted to appear in at a ball of two hundred people, and tell him how I served the model of it. I am not ashamed of what I've done." And once more Steven took up his hat and moved across to the door.

"And neither—in spite of all those grand declamations—am I ashamed!" cried Dora, watching him with flashing eyes. "If other women of good position, and good birth, and everything, had not appeared in page-costume, of course I should never have thought of it; but they have—Lady Alicia Hall wore this very dress—and I'm not ashamed, and I don't take your ultimatum as final. Suppose, I say, that I *choose* to go to this fancy-ball?"

"I will suppose nothing of the kind. You are talking nonsense," said Steven, still not unkindly; still in a voice not very different to that in which he might have addressed a wilful, reasonless child.

"Nonsense, am I? That remains to be seen. You are not in Central America now, remember, but in civilized Europe, and I'm your wife, sir—not your squaw, your slave—and a free agent! If I say that I will stay in Paris, that I will go to Lady Sarah's ball—what then?"

"Why then," said Steven, laconically, "you might stay here, as far as I'm concerned, for good. Ashcot may be dull and dreary—I'm afraid it is so to you, Dora—but the women who have lived there have been honest wives, thank God! Ashcot would be no place

for a lady who had gone in male attire, and against her husband's wishes, to a Parisian masquerade."

As he spoke, Dot had watched him narrowly, and in her inmost heart—a heart wholly frivolous; untainted, as yet, by worse than frivolity—she felt that she respected him. "We'll talk no more of this," she said, turning shortly away. "I have not been ungenerous to you. I have not blamed you, even, as the world blames you, for your intimacy with the Barrys; but, of course, power is in your hands, and you use it. Thank heaven, the discussion is over!"

"Amen!" said Steven, drily, and left her.

CHAPTER XII.

On the Brink of Avernus.

HE had scarcely quitted the house ten minutes when a fiacre, containing two English travellers, drove up before the door.

"The Honourable Augustus Dynevor was not fastidious as to the quality of air he breathed," remarked the Squire, when he and Katharine, a minute later, had made their way up to the dark, unsavoury landing of the entresol. "The direction you can send your friends in England is the best thing about the house, I should say; but show, not comfort, is just what poor Dot would care for! Now let me ask for her, Kate. I know the ways of these French servants, and their 'Madam paw visible,' better than you do."

Thereupon, the Squire gave a long ring at the entresol bell; and when Dora's femme de ménage: old and mœnad-like, as only a Parisian charwoman can be: answered it, planted his umbrella well within the

door, as an advance-guard, before giving her time to speak. "Madam est aller maisong? Oh no, of course not. Kate, my dear, go in—don't believe a word of it—French women *never* tell the truth."

"Mais, Monsieur—Madame est souffrante! Madame ne reçoit jamais le matin!" expostulated the poor mœnad, shrilly. "Mademoiselle Aglaë!" shriller still; "venez donc parler à ces Messieurs!"

Mademoiselle Aglaë was a large-eyed, coffee-hued young person, with a waist of eighteen inches, and green ribbons coquettishly set in glossy black hair—Dora's work-woman, lady's maid, and confidante, at thirty sous a day. She came forward with the grimace that amongst Frenchwomen of her class passes for a smile, and made a little reverence to the Squire. "Madame Laurent est désolée, Monsieur et Madame, mais—"

"Mais we are going to see her," said Mr. Hilliard, marching straight past Mademoiselle Aglaë, and knocking at the first door he saw with the head of his umbrella. "Dora, my dear!" in his cheery English voice. "Dora!" still louder, "we've travelled all the way from Kent to pay you a morning visit, and we mean to come in whether you're visible, or desolate, or not."

And now Aglaë and the mœnad beheld a sight such as their black eyes never beheld before: Madame, in her not-too-dainty dressing-gown—Madame, her hair in pins, slippered, unrouged, suddenly "visible," and throwing her arms round the neck, first of one, then the other, of these untimely English visitors.

"Dear Uncle Frank—Kate; and you never wrote to tell me! Aglaë, c'est ma cousine—ma sœur. Viens donc voir si Mademoiselle est gentille! Steven hasn't

been gone ten minutes; you must have passed him close to the house. We have very little room, Uncle Frank," running before him into the salon; "our apartment is a modest one—a nut-shell—and I'm obliged to do my needle-work in the drawing-room, but I *think* I can find you a chair."

The Squire seated himself gingerly on the edge of one of the crimson velvet arm-chairs, from which Dora had first to sweep away a whole avalanche of finery, and looked about the room in a sort of wonder. Patterns, women's work-tools, a toilette-glass on the table; shreds and ribbons on the floor; oceans of billowy white blonde and muslin everywhere. "And is this your sitting-room?" he cried. "And do you mean to tell me you find room for that big husband of yours among all this stock of tulle! Have you set up a milliner's shop, Mrs. Dora, or what?"

Dora, her arm round Katharine's waist, answered that she had not set up a milliner's shop, though no one, alas! as Uncle Frank knew, could be better suited to do so than herself. She had made a good many kind friends in Paris, fortunately for her! and her friends asked her out sometimes, and such modest toilettes as she required (the Squire thought of the bills that had been sent to him for Mrs. Lawrence's wedding outfit) she prepared herself. Steven was so seldom at home, and there was so little light on the other side of the house, that she was glad to use her drawing-room to work in of a morning.

"And are you getting stronger, Dot?" said Katharine, looking down steadily at her cousin's face. "You are thin, I am afraid. You don't look as if the air of Paris had done you all the good we expected."

"I shall be better now you have come," cried Dot, affectionately. "I—well, in spite of the kindness of my friends, I must confess, I *have* felt a very little lonely of late! Where are you staying? Hôtel Rivoli; ah, how delightful! we can see each other all day long. I have a carriage by the month—yes, Uncle Frank, it sounds extravagant; but, as I say to Steven, surely it is better to pay the stable-keeper than the physician! and I can take you about, dear Kate, and show you Paris. I know a great many people. I can get you invitations for every night of your life, if you choose."

Katharine hesitated, then looked down at the floor. The Squire spoke out boldly. "We have not come to Paris for ball-going, Dot, thank you, and—and we have heard already that you have a numerous acquaintance. 'Tis to be hoped you look well into the character of your friends," he added; for Mr. Hilliard was a man who seldom beat long about the bush in anything he had got to say. "English people don't live about on the Continent, as a rule, unless they have very good reasons for not stopping at home, and you know you are fond of pleasure, and if Lawrence, as we hear, does not go with you—" the Squire shook his head, and looked altogether as though he had very poor opinion of the results to which little Mrs. Dora's Parisian friends and their entertainments were likely to lead.

Dot shot a keen glance, first at her uncle's face, then at Katharine's. What had they heard? What was the meaning of this sudden flight to Paris in the middle of the hunting season? Were they here as Steven's allies or hers? Was her chance of wearing

the blue and silver heightened, in fine, or lessened by their advent?

"I know the nicest people in Paris, Uncle Frank. You cannot have heard a word against any friend of mine. Miss Long—you remember, my bridesmaid, Grizelda Long? well, she introduced me to dear little Lady B——, and through her a great many people have called on me, and——"

"And, Lawrence?" interrupted the Squire. "Are his friends the nicest people in Paris, too?"

"You will put that question to himself, please," said Dot, dropping her eyelids. "I can tell you nothing whatever about Steven's friends. He is out all day; I scarcely see him except at meals."

"Well," said the Squire, looking around him anew, "if you have as many yards of muslin about always as you have to-day, I shouldn't say there was much room for him at home. What time is it now? Half-past eleven. You have become very fashionable in your hours, Dot—got into the slovenly French habit of dressing-gowns too. A young wife like you ought to be as neat and fresh when she sits down to breakfast with her husband as at any other hour of the day. What do you say, Kate?"

"That every one knows their own failings best—don't you, Kate?" interposed Mrs. Lawrence. "If I was strong I would be up with the lark—out in the fresh air every morning of my life, but I'm not strong," an opportune short hollow cough interrupted her. "I can take nothing till eleven, and then only a cup of chocolate, and Steven, poor fellow, has such an appetite! So we find it better for each of us to keep to our own hours. I assure you I manage our house-keeping very

economically. The old creature who let you in constitutes our whole establishment, and she is on board-wages, and our dinner is sent from a restaurant, and—and we have only two meals a day!" added Dot, with touching candour.

"And, if you have a grain of sense between you, will be thankful to get back to your own comfortable home," said the Squire, rising to his feet. "The air of this room isn't good for human beings, Dora! I don't like your looks at all, and I shall tell your husband so. You have had quite enough of Paris, in my opinion, and had much better give up a little of your term, and come back with Kate and me when we go?"

A conscious blush rose over Dot's face. "I—I should be ready to go to-morrow," she cried, "as far as I am concerned; but then Steven——"

"Oh, leave Steven to me," said Mr. Hilliard. "I'll never believe Lawrence can have got so fond of town-life as to want to stay, with you ready to return. Where is he likely to be found? I might stroll out and take a look after him while you two girls have your talk together about dressmakers and furbelows."

"Kate must stop with me for the day," cried Mrs. Lawrence, possessing herself of Katharine's hand. "I shall give up all other engagements, all other friends, now that she has come! Leave Kate with me, dear Uncle Frank, and don't expect to see anything more of her till six o'clock at the earliest."

"And where shall I find Lawrence? at Galignani's, or where?"

"I—I never heard of Steven going to Galignani's," cried Dot, her eyelids lowered again. "If I speak the

truth, I have not the slightest idea where to tell you to look for him."

So the Squire went out, to while away the time as best he might by watching such carriages and horses as at this hour of the day were to be seen; comparing them, with tranquil satisfaction, in his mind's eye with the horses and carriages in London; and Katharine and Steven's wife were left alone to have their talk about fashions and furbelows.

"Dearest Katharine!" cried Mrs. Lawrence with effusion the moment Mr. Hilliard had gone. "You could not have come at a more welcome time. I have so much to tell you—my heart is so full—('Aglaë, Aglaë, viens donc,'" the parenthesis in Dot's voluble Parisian French. "'Take the grenadine into my room, there is light enough close under the window, and finish the fluting thyself, not a hair's breadth deeper than I have marked, my daughter, and the blonde just to show on the top'). I beg your pardon, Katharine, dear, but I'm obliged to make my dresses at home, and this poor faithful girl is invaluable to me. Oh, Kate, Kate! what an empty farce life seems at times! What—*what* are blondes and laces with an unsatisfied aching heart?"

She threw herself down wearily in the same chair where Steven had sat when he looked at M. Valentin's sketch—the torn shreds of paper close beside her on the table—and seemed likely to weep. And all Miss Fane's sympathies froze on the spot. Compassionate, generous, though she was by nature, Katharine, at this moment, was a woman prepared to sit in judgment upon a faulty sister; and the rice-powdered cheeks, the hair-pinned head, the tawdry apartment, the eagerness

about blondes and fluting were all taken by her at truest valuation. Valuation, I need scarcely say, wholly unfavourable to any impending scene of contrition or of sentiment.

"If life seems a farce, it's because we make it one," she said, bluntly. "You and I, and the rest of us, Dora. If you are really suffering, really sick at heart, why go to these parties? Why labour, above all, at the rehearsal, if acting in the play itself gives you no pleasure?"

"Because one never finds the exact point at which to stop; because one thinks every day will bring something better worth living for than the last; because—oh, Kate! don't lecture me! Uncle Frank has done that. If you knew all, you would pity, much more than you would blame me."

"I blame no one, and I do pity you—you, and Steven still more," cried Katharine, "in the life that you are leading. Dot, by-the-bye, how is it you have never mentioned Mr. Clarendon Whyte in any of your letters to me?"

Mrs. Lawrence stooped her face down over the little heap of torn paper upon the table. The action, naturally enough, brought something more of colour into her white cheeks. "Did I not mention Mr. Clarendon Whyte? I can hardly think that—I'm sure I meet him often enough! Unless I had mentioned him, how did you know he was in Paris?"

"I have heard of his being here from two different sources," said Katharine, severely. "I have also heard—but that I won't believe until you tell me it is so—that he is seen a great deal too often at Mrs. Lawrence's side."

Dot burst into a thoroughly unconcerned laugh. "My poor, dear Katharine! what airs of tragedy do we all give ourselves to-day! First Uncle Frank (no, first the master of the house—I must tell you another time about the scene we have had), then me, then you. 'Mr. Whyte seen too often at Mrs. Lawrence's side!' Kate, you know me pretty well. Was I, in my most foolish days, a person to be unduly carried away by sentiment? Now that I am married am I likely, any more than Mrs. Dering—I can say nothing stronger!—to compromise myself, or my husband, because Mr. Clarendon Whyte wears good gloves and happens to be an excellent waltzer?"

"Compromise! no, but——"

"But allow poor Mr. Whyte to take me to and from my carriage, and give me bouquets, for which he has my spare dances in return, and do commissions for me, and escort me and my friends to the theatre when my husband is too lazy to go? Certainly, Katharine dear, I do allow all this. Why not?"

The one genuine gift with which Nature had endowed Dot was the gift of mimicry. She had made her little speech, her self-defence, in Mrs. Dering's voice, with Mrs. Dering's elevation of eyebrow; concluding it by the half-yawn wherewith Mrs. Dering was wont to dismiss any subject of thorough insignificance.

In spite of herself Katharine was obliged to laugh. "Arabella has been a great deal longer married, a great deal more in the world than you, Dot, and besides——"

"General Dering is in a very different position to Steven Lawrence of Ashcot, and so his wife may allow

herself greater freedom of action. Is that what you would say, my dear?"

"To a certain extent, yes. In the early days of her marriage Arabella lived much more quietly than she does now, and certainly never went out without her husband. And Steven is *not* General Dering, nor Paris London!" cried Katharine, with more energy than logic; "and I think Grizelda Long a bad companion for you, and Clarendon Whyte a worse, and you shall give up the remainder of your term—papa is quite right; what good is Paris doing you?—and come back home when we do. Yes, Dot, I say you shall."

Something admirably like real emotion made Dora's eyes soften. "If Steven would speak like that! If Steven would show genuine affectionate interest in me what a different woman I should be! But he does not."

"Then don't tell me anything about it," cried Katharine, stoutly. "I would rather not hear one word from you against your husband, please. I can't—I will never believe that it is by Steven's wish you lead this wretched life apart that you are now doing."

Dora bent down her face once more, and carefully collected together every minutest morsel of M. Valentin's sketch. "Kate," she said, after a minute, fitting in piece after piece like a dissecting puzzle as she spoke, "your friendship for Steven, much as I admire it, should not, I think, make you unjust to Steven's wife. We do lead a life apart—a wretched life, if you choose, for bride and bridegroom of yesterday—and why?"

"Steven never cared for town amusements, or the habits of a town-life. When you first wrote, you used

to tell me how much enjoyment he got out of the parties to which you took him!"

"Exactly. He got no more enjoyment out of parties than I did out of the lonely Ashcot days when I sat listening to the kitchen-clock, and he hunted. Still, I bore those days, remember! It was Steven who separated himself from me, not I from him."

Miss Fane coloured, and was silent.

"Yes, I bore those wretched days," went on Dot, "and Steven, for the very short time I required such a sacrifice of him, might have borne with my balls and parties, my frivolities, call them by what name you like! He has not done so. He has chosen to let me go into the world by myself; has chosen his own associates, his own life. Whatever you, Katharine Fane, may think, the world has formed a pretty definite opinion as to which has the most grounds for complaint, —Steven or I."

"And how do you know what the world says?" cried Katharine, warmly. "Is there a man or woman living whom you would suffer to talk to you about your husband's demerits?"

"My dear Kate, I am not romantic! Always remember that. I am not romantic, and am quite capable of looking at my husband's conduct without bias. He married me—not for love! and in the very first days of our marriage we lived a life apart. Do you remember my telling you how I would watch him in Paris before we had been married a week, watch him and feel that, if he once broke loose, he was a man to commit any act of desperation or folly imaginable? Well, he *has* broken loose! Voilà! he *has* broken loose; and a woman who has lived as many years as I have

doesn't need to be told what must be thought of him by the world. Stay a few days in Paris; talk to your friend George Gordon—of all men the last to be prejudiced in my favour—and see if you will defend Steven as enthusiastically then."

"I don't defend him!" said Katharine. "I defend no one. I only say I am certain Steven is not to blame——"

"And that I am!" interrupted Dot. "A la bonne heure, Katharine! Some day, if I come to worse trouble than now, 'don't defend' me as you 'don't defend' Steven; that is all."

"I shall try always to be just," said Katharine, inflexibly. "It was by your wish that Steven came to Paris. It was by your wish, even according to your own accounts, that you first forced him to balls and parties——"

"And it is by my wish that Steven lives, shows himself openly to the world at Mademoiselle Barry's side," said Dora, playing out this, her winning card, with quiet emphasis. "Well, as you choose. What use is there for me to contradict you?"

"At . . . at Mademoiselle Barry's side?" stammered Katharine. "Who is Mademoiselle Barry? I don't understand—I never heard——"

"You never heard—I never told you—that Steven had found amusements, formed acquaintance of his own?"

"I heard he played too high at cards," said poor Katharine, in an altered voice; "that he was among a dangerous set of men—it was a little for this that we came to Paris—I may tell you now, Dora! Papa thought it would be well for him to speak to Steven himself;

“speak to him and save him, if there there was time, from still further folly.”

Save Steven from folly! These good, simple people had come on no other errand, then, than this! What a load seemed lifted from little Mrs. Lawrence’s spirit! She saw herself in the blue and silver (Steven by some adroit coup de main conjured away out of Paris) before a crowd of two hundred admiring spectators yet!

“Don’t, please, look so desperately concerned, my dear Katharine! I know quite well that such things happen daily in the world, that a wife would only be laughed at for taking her husband’s neglect too deeply to heart! If Steven observed the bienséances I would be silent; but for him to be seen in picture-galleries, in the public walks, at theatres (the theatres he won’t go to with me!) in the society of such people—it is too much, too much!” cried Dot, shaking her little head, and looking pathetically indignant.

“And who is Mademoiselle Barry?” asked Katharine, presently, with downcast, averted face, with trembling lips.

“Mademoiselle Barry is the daughter of M. Dermot Barry, an Irish gentleman living upon his wits, and is precisely the most dangerous kind of woman imaginable for a man as unsuspecting as Steven to fall in with. I know the whole story of his acquaintance with her: he has told it me himself, poor fellow!” Dot never strayed further than she could actually help from the truth. “An acquaintance made without introduction in the Luxembourg Gardens, the father at her side, and beginning with talk about pictures, and palaces, and the French Revolution, and I know not what besides; for

Mademoiselle Barry's strong point, I must tell you, is intellect."

"Oh, go on, go on!" cried Katharine; "if indeed it is a history that you should tell, or I listen to."

"It is a history that you *must* listen to if you mean to stay a week in Paris," said Mrs. Lawrence, calmly; "and few people, I fancy, will tell it you in language so favourable to Steven as I shall. I don't, I cannot, believe him to be more than infatuated for the moment, as I told him to-day—alas! as I told him not an hour before you came! He is fond, as we knew long ago, of play, and he has as much play as he chooses, without the trouble of white gloves and evening-dress at the Barrys' house. And then, can it be otherwise, Kate? his vanity is flattered by Mademoiselle Barry's manifest preference for himself. She is clever, no doubt, and 'sympathique,'—the wife or daughter of a man like M. Barry is sure to be sympathique—and her present rôle is just the one to touch the heart of my poor good Steven: delicate health, draws of an evening for money, M. Barry at her elbow making his hundreds and hundreds at lansquenet! spends her life in studying among the picture galleries . . . and in improving the mind of any unusually-foolish victim of her father's, Steven Lawrence at the present moment! upon whose arm she may chance to lean."

"Is she pretty?" This was all Katharine could ask: then she broke down.

"No, and yes," answered Dot. "I have not seen her close, so I go by what Steven himself tells me. Mademoiselle Barry, according to his account, possesses no regularity of features, only a pair of dark-grey eyes, a fragile white hand, an exquisite voice—why *do* plain

women always have fragile white hands and exquisite voices, I wonder? possesses, to use his own words, not beauty, but something higher and better than all the classical upper-lips and rose-leaf complexions in the world. That his infatuation will be cured the moment we can get him out of Paris, I do not doubt!" cried Dot, warming to the part she was enacting, "any more than I doubt that his infatuation exists. My dear Katharine, he is never away from the Barrys', morning, noon, or night; and in saying this I think I say enough. Now, does the whole fault of our estrangement rest with me or not?"

"Forgive me, Dot, forgive me!" and coming over to Mrs. Lawrence's side, Katharine caught her hand, and pressed it with sudden warmth in her own. "Never fear I will say a harsh word to you, never fear I will take Steven Lawrence's part again! *I have done with him!*" cried Miss Fane; an expression, such as they had never worn before, gathering round her lips. "And I think, please, we will speak on this subject no more."

"Only one thing, Kate. You can understand how even frivolous pleasures, even the attentions of a man like Clarendon Whyte, have seemed welcome to me?"

"I can understand everything," answered Katherine, while tears: were they all of pity for Dot? rose slowly in her eyes. Then she stooped and kissed Mrs. Lawrence, with a kiss whose fervour Dot's mind was, happily, too self-engrossed to seek to annalyze.

In these five minutes Steven's warmest friend has gone over, heart and soul, to the enemy. His wife looks upon the wearing of her blue and silver as a certainty, and is content!

. . . . But the Squire never went over to the enemy at all. Katharine spent the whole remainder of that day with Mrs. Lawrence: waited in the small close salon while Mademoiselle Aglaë aided in her mistress's noonday transformation; received Mr. Clarendon Whyte with a friendliness she had never shown towards him before, when, at three o'clock, that resistless hero came in to receive the daily incense upon which his vanity lived; drove with Dora in the Champs Elysées, and again endured Mr. Whyte, and Mr. Whyte's conversation, for another hour later on in the afternoon. "And, I am glad to say, I know, that every word spoken against Dora is mere heartless, idle talk," she told her stepfather, when they were sitting alone together in the evening. "I am ashamed to think, papa, that I ever listened to a breath against her. She seems to know some of the nicest people in Paris, and, of course, is admired and receives attention, poor Dot! *Wherever* the fault lies," went on Katharine, with cruel emphasis, "for very certain it is not hers. Indeed, I think, few women in poor Dot's position, would bear up one half as well as she does!" And she sighed.

"I don't know anything about 'bearing up,'" said the Squire, "and I don't understand women's dresses, but it struck me, when I saw you driving together to-day, that Dot had not at all the look of a modest English wife about her, and the room, when we called this morning, was enough to set any man against staying at home. When I have had a talk with Lawrence we shall know better what he is about, but I'll not judge him unheard. If Mrs. Dora left her face as God made it, and went a-foot instead of in that ridi-

culous sham-private brougham, I would be more ready to listen to her complaints against her husband."

Accordingly next morning, at an hour when Dot, as usual, was still sleeping off the effects of the night's dissipation, Mr. Hilliard made his appearance, well pleased and rosy, at the breakfast table of the Hôtel Rivoli; where Katharine, fresh and simply dressed as only an Englishwoman knows how to be at nine in the morning, was waiting to pour out his tea.

"Well, Kate, I've seen the culprit, and had it out with him! I called there early, and found him at his breakfast—a cup of ill-looking coffee set on one corner of the table, with that witch for his attendant—and we went out together for a walk. Your friend, whoever he was, seems to have written you very exaggerated accounts. It's all right, Kate, my love, as far as Lawrence is concerned."

"I am glad you think so, papa," said Katharine, stiffly.

"Think? It is not a matter of thinking, but of figures," answered the Squire; "two or three more lumps of sugar, if you please, my dear; this French beetroot stuff doesn't sweeten a bit. I asked Lawrence frankly what he was doing,—told him I heard he had been burning his fingers, and the rest of it, and he assures me, on his word, that five-and-thirty pounds would very nearly cover his losses."

"Oh, it isn't the money alone," said Katharine, holding down her face. "I don't consider that Steven—that any married man has the right to associate with such people at all!"

"Kate, my dear," answered Mr. Hilliard, "excuse me for telling you that you are talking very great

nonsense. Steven Lawrence is a young man, fond, as we knew even at Ashcot, of a bit of play when he comes across it. Do you expect, when Dora is off to her balls, that he will sit down among the millinery and read an improving book, or play cribbage with the witch, or what?"

"I think he should respect himself and his wife!" cried Katharine, angry-eyed; "and I don't—no, papa, I *don't* think it a subject for jesting. If Steven Lawrence does not choose to go with his wife into society—decent society!—he should at least not outrage her by exhibiting himself with the vile associates to whom he has sunk."

"Exhibiting himself? vile associates?" cried the Squire, looking up from his broiled chicken. "Kate, child, keep your indignation for the things you understand. Give your cousin good advice about her dress, she wants it bad enough, and leave Steven alone. If the poor fellow can get hold of this M. Barry, or any other Englishman, to walk about with, it's very natural he should do so, sooner than walk alone. As to vile-ness! if they had been very vile he would have lost more than five-and-thirty pounds by this time, you may be sure!"

"You think of nothing but money—money," said Katharine, "as if *that* mattered!"

"It matters a great deal to me," answered the Squire. "If Steven had made a fool of himself my pockets, sooner or later, would have had to pay for it. But, with all his simplicity, the lad is not so ignorant of the world as you would think. He saw a good deal of sharp practice when he was a youth in Cali-

fornia. Keeps his eyes open, from what he tells me, even on this Monsieur Barry and his friends—”

“Suspects them, yet stoops to be their associate still!” interrupted Miss Fane, with cold contempt.

“Well, as to suspecting,” said the Squire, “no man of sense ever sits down to play at cards with strangers without ‘suspecting’ that his own interest is what it behoves him to watch. You are a trifle unjust, it seems to me, Kate; like all women must be a partisan, not a friend. Lawrence has found amusements of his own (has spent less on them, probably, than ninety-nine men out of a hundred of his age would have done), and because this don’t exactly please his wife, and you, through his wife, he is to be called bad names.”

Katharine remained trifling, nervously, for a minute or two with her tea-spoon. “Papa,” she said, at last, abruptly, “do you know”—every word coming from her lips with an effort—“that there is a Miss Barry?”

“A Miss Barry!” repeated the Squire, still with thorough good humour; “no, I hadn’t heard of her before; but what if there is? What does it matter to us if there are half a dozen Miss Barrys?”

“Oh, papa! but Steven walks about the streets of Paris, is seen at the theatres with this person—a person no one visits—the daughter of a man like M. Barry!”

“My dear Katharine,” said the Squire, “just take my advice, and don’t listen to any ridiculous jealous fancies that Dora chooses to take up about her husband. What do you know worse about Miss Barry than about Mrs. Lawrence’s ladies and honourables? ’Twas her doing dragging Lawrence away from the place where he was safe and happy—his own farm; and the ball-

going, and the hired brougham, and all the rest of the expense, has been her doing. Lawrence has played a few games of lansquenet, has lost altogether something under forty pounds; and, so far as I can see (as you are so perfectly satisfied regarding your cousin), we might very well have saved ourselves our journey to Paris. Still, as we have come, we'll see all there is to be seen, and then take Dot home with us,—if we can. I wish I had as good an opinion of her and of her integrity," added Mr. Hilliard, "as I have of her husband's."

But Katharine was relentless in her judgments against Steven—relentless to an extent that a keener judge of human nature than the Squire might have held to savour rather of jealousy than of the calm and temperate displeasure of reasonable friendship. "Dear Kate, in short, thinks *quite* as I do about your intimacy with these people," Dot tells her husband, with triumph, on the first opportunity she can find; and—"I should think my actions must be a matter of most thorough indifference, now and always, to Miss Fane!" is Steven's answer, as he turns curtly away. And so, when these two meet, Dot finds, not without satisfaction, that they talk a few common-places about Paris, about the weather, part with a cold shake of the hand; and after this first meeting see, and seek to see, each other no more.

The ten days for which the Squire had leave of absence passed on; and Dora and Katharine, as far as daylight hours went, were always together.... While she lives Katharine believes that she must remember with acutest remorse that miserable time in Paris! The companionship that she put up with of Mr.

Clarendon Whyte and of his peers; the fatuous frivolity upon which she forced herself to smile; the parading, the driving, the whirl of outward amusement where her heart was not, and across which Steven's reproachful face came upon her, ever and anon, like a ghost's! Can any future, can any expiation atone, she asks herself, for the ignominious rôle she filled; the share she bore in hastening the oncoming evil; in smoothing the already too-smooth downward road along which Dora's feet were progressing? So have most of us felt (poor actors, blindly acting our little parts!) when—the performance over, the lights burnt out—grey morning, breaking coldly, has shown us a dismantled stage: a stage of lath and plaster.... How different to what it looked when we strutted there; our own passions for audience; amidst the fever and excitement of the play!

Dora, all this time in capital spirits, is conscious of no darker oncoming evil than the day on which she shall, perforce, bid Paris good-bye; of no steeper down-hill road than that gentle declivity along which she returns, daily, from her drive in the Bois. Katharine and the Squire have settled to remain until the eleventh, just long enough to see Lord Petres on his return to Paris; the masquerade of Lady Sarah Adair is to be on the ninth. How if Steven—poor honest fellow!—could be brought to see the wisdom of going home, say about the seventh, merely to get Ashcot ready for her, and she return, two or three days later, under the sober chaperonage of Uncle Frank? Over this possibility Dot only broods; believing silence, at the present juncture, her highest wisdom. But meantime Monsieur Valentin's sketch has been repaired,

patiently, accurately, as ever Madonna of Raphael's was repaired by reverential fingers. And Mademoiselle Aglaë is taking it for her model in the manufacture of a blue and silver dress over which she and Madame cogitate, night and day, with stealthy eagerness. And among the intimate friends of Mrs. Lawrence—Grizelda Long and Clarendon Whyte included—there exists very small fear as to the train-bearer of Marie de Medicis being found wanting at the last.

Thus, then, they stand: Dot wearing six delightfully-expensive costumes per diem; with hair, complexion, cut of dress, views of human responsibility, all up to the last mark of the Second Empire: Katharine Fane, heavy in spirit, but acquiescent, at her side: Mr. Clarendon Whyte—perfumed locks as usual well-set around the brainless head, feebly planning as much evil as he knows how to compass—her shadow: poor honest Steven loitering, downcast, by Mademoiselle Barry's side through picture-galleries of a morning, losing more or less money every night; chafing, wearying with impatient heart under it all. Thus the dramatis personæ stand, in readiness for the curtain to rise upon the inevitable last act. The two who possess stout human hearts and capable human brains despondent, ill at rest: Mr. Clarendon Whyte and Dot quite untroubled in their butterfly conscience as they dance and flutter, and admire the brilliancy of each other's plumes, upon the brink of Avernus!

CHAPTER XIII.

Progress of the Silver and Blue.

A WELCOME respite: the solitary change Katharine ever got from Mrs. Lawrence and Mrs. Lawrence's associates: was during the forenoon—a time of day when she and the Squire were free to run about Paris after their own fashion, untroubled by the dress and talk and thousand-and-one monotonous frivolities of butterfly, Champs Elysées' life. Their only companion during these early walks was George Gordon, the "old dandy" who had first awakened Steven's jealousy in London, and whose friendship, in the present sick state of Katharine's heart, was more than ever welcome to her. George Gordon talked on none of the themes to which, among Mr. Clarendon Whyte and his fellows, she was forced, silently-indignant, to listen. With George Gordon she could feel once more that she was with a man, her equal, not a popinjay. George Gordon belonged, too, to the past; the girlish untroubled past, when she had believed herself to be happy in her engagement, and when all the realities of life, the passionate pain, the restless fever of the last miserable months were as yet unknown. With George Gordon, the Squire trotting on contentedly in front, Katharine could linger through the picture-galleries and churches, or walk along through the crisp sunny morning air and almost forget that she was in Paris; almost forget that Steven was at Made-moiselle Barry's side, and that she had not so much as the right to mourn over his lost allegiance!

One February morning, the day on which Lord Petres was expected to return, Mr. Hilliard, wearied to

death, in reality, of Paris and of sight-seeing, declared his intention of remaining at home by the fire to nurse his rheumatism; and Katharine and George Gordon went off alone to spend the forenoon, for the last time, among the pictures at the Louvre. "I hope papa means to get better by this evening," said Katharine, as they were sitting in her favourite resting-place midway down the French gallery—for Miss Fane, I must confess, had no more appreciation of high art than Steven himself: preferred, and owned she preferred, Greuze to either Michael Angelo or Titian. "If he is not, you must be my chaperon, Captain Gordon. We have got a box at the Châtelet, and as it will be almost my last Paris dissipation, I should be sorry to have to stay at home."

She was looking paler, more spiritless, even, than usual this morning; and George Gordon scrutinized her face steadily. "The thing they are playing at the Châtelet is Cendrillon still. Nothing whatever to see in it but fireworks, upholstery, and milliners' work, with a hundred or a hundred-and-fifty exceptionally ugly Frenchwomen dressed as fairies. If Mr. Hilliard's rheumatism gets worse, I can assure you you may congratulate yourself on being allowed to stop quietly at home."

"But upholstery and milliners' work are what we like," said Katharine, "or rather what Dora Lawrence likes. She has seen Cendrillon twice before, and tells me it is the most beautiful thing that was ever put on the stage."

"Dora Lawrence?—but if you go with her, you will want neither Mr. Hilliard nor me," said George Gordon. "Mrs. Lawrence will chaperon you. For myself, I am

really and truly engaged to dine with Petres, if he arrives."

"Mrs. Lawrence! oh, I never look upon poor little Dot in the light of a chaperon," said Katharine. "Most people," she added, with rather a faint smile, "would not be as anxious to decline the offer as you are, Captain Gordon."

Captain Gordon remained silently thoughtful for more than a minute. "Miss Fane," he said then, "if I speak to you like an old friend—I've a right to do so, mind, in virtue of my great age and the length of time I have known you, and Petres too—I wonder whether you will forgive me?"

Katharine's eyes sank abashed. Instinctively she felt that some mention of Steven, and of Steven's iniquities, was coming. "You know quite well I will not be offended," she said. "You know I shall be always ready to hear whatever you think fit to tell me."

"Well, then, I will say it in three words. We have never spoken yet about that letter I wrote you—I'm afraid what I was forced to say in it gave you pain?"

"It gave me infinite pain," answered Katharine, without lifting her eyes from the ground.

"And your coming to Paris was a little, perhaps, the result of what you heard. So much I have guessed. Well——"

"Oh, don't hesitate!" cried Katharine. "Tell me in three words, please, as you promised."

"Well, it's a pity you should be seen so much with Mrs. Lawrence, then," said George Gordon, point-blank. "A great pity. I ought to have had the courage to tell you so long ago."

And now Katharine did look up; her face all aglow with indignant surprise. "A pity I should be seen with Mrs. Lawrence—with my cousin? You are prejudiced; you never, in your heart, liked poor little Dot, or you would not speak like this."

"I believe I am the least prejudiced man living," said George Gordon, in his gentle voice; "still, I hold it a pity that you should help, or be thought to help on the intimacy between your cousin and a man like Clarendon Whyte. These things happen every day, I know. Mrs. Lawrence is a very pretty little woman, and a very nice little woman—I have not a word to say against her—and her husband like a man of sense, reconciles himself to his position. What I do say is, that 'tis a pity Katharine Fane's name should be mentioned in connection with the Lawrence household. If Petres was in Paris he would tell you the same. There are a few women—just a very few in the world—whose names deserve never to be so much as breathed upon, and I hold you to be one of them, Miss Fane."

"And I hold that the world is a cruel and an unjust world!" exclaimed Katharine. "You have spoken plainly, so will I. Your letter *was* the cause that brought us to Paris, and we found—found——" But her voice broke down, died, when she would have forced it to speak a condemning word of Steven!

"You found Mrs. Lawrence enjoying herself immensely, engaged to three balls a night, half the young men in Paris wild about her, Mr. Clarendon Whyte her inseparable companion, and resolved——"

"I found my cousin less happy than I would have liked to find her in her own home," interrupted Katharine, coldly, "and I intend to be seen with her, to be

intimate with her, always. Let the world say its worst—I can bear it! What does the world know of the sorrows we women have to endure, silently, in our own hearts? Dora is like a child! as fond of pretty dresses and dancing as a girl of fifteen. Her life when she returns to England will have few enough pleasures in it—poor little thing! and I am glad, yes, Captain Gordon, glad to see her make the most of any poor amusement she can get now. She needs something more than her own home can give her, heaven knows!” And even while she says this, with flushing cheeks, with kindling eyes, in her inmost heart Katharine knows every word she utters is uttered against her own conscience, and stops short.

“And why (more than all other women, that is to say) does Mrs. Lawrence need amusement that her own home cannot give her?” George Gordon asked. “Don’t be angry with me; this is the last disagreeable thing I shall say; but why—for you are always logical, Miss Fane—why, married to as good a fellow as Lawrence—Petres told me all about him—is your cousin to be so deeply pitied?”

“I think you spoke of Steven Lawrence in a very different strain when you wrote to me,” cried Katharine, reddening. “Pray is he going through his apprenticeship to lansquenet and baccarat still? The subject of each others’ failings is one on which I will allow that men have fullest right always to be heard.”

But of Steven Captain Gordon could tell no more than he had already told in his letter. Mrs. Lawrence, the beautiful little Mrs. Lawrence, “la Bébé Anglaise,” as she was called: gilded Parisian youth fixing on the same name for her that she had gone by, sixteen years

before, in the Faubourg St. Marceau: was a theme on which half the clubs of Paris talked—in a certain strain. The companions, the actions, the existence of the Bébé's husband were details, naturally, of supremest unimportance to everyone. Captain Gordon had heard accidentally that Steven Lawrence spent his time among a set of men where, sooner or later, spoliation was certain; but what of this? Most men had to pay pretty dearly for their first introduction to Parisian play. It might be a good thing for a simple kind of fellow like Dora Lawrence's husband to be well fleeced now; would teach him, perhaps, the wisdom of playing with men of whose character he knew something for the remainder of his life.

"If Dora Lawrence's husband were only the simple kind of fellow that you think!" cried Katharine. "Unfortunately he is not, and for a man such as Steven Lawrence *is*, I would not have much faith in the good that was to be attained through doubtful associates and lansquenets. But come away," she interrupted herself, rising hastily, "and let us look at the pictures—a far pleasanter spectacle than the lives of men and women living in this work-day world! It was right of you, no doubt, to say what you said, and I . . . must just do all I can to take care of poor little Dot now. We have each of us our own burthen to carry, you know—our own burthen!" And, with her face wearing a more spiritless look even than before, she put her hand under George Gordon's arm, then walked away silently at his side, down the gallery.

Greuze and Watteau, as usual, were the favourites with the crowd of patient female copyists in the Louvre. Almost with a feeling of envy Katharine looked at

these women as she walked along. That brisk-eyed, grey-haired old Frenchwoman enamelling the "Cruche Cassée," on porcelain, with such Chinese fidelity of touch; that slim young girl standing, in her linen blouse, before the easel where the blooming faces of the cottage bride and her sister were growing into life under her brush:—How peaceful the existence of these artist-women must be, shut away in this quiet gallery from the glare, and noise, and trouble of the outer world! What care could they know save over the drying of paint or varnish? what despair but the momentary artist despair of emulating some turn of lip or eyebrow in their models? And, even as she thought this, the girl whom she was watching looked round (showing a face with beauty beyond that of line or colouring, on the delicate, broad forehead, the serious, sensitive lips), and Katharine saw, with sudden start, a tall man's figure upon her other side. It was Steven, and this was Mademoiselle Barry. No need for Katharine Fane to be told her name! This woman, whom a moment ago she had ignorantly envied, this girl-artist, shut out from the noise and trouble of the outer world, was M. Barry's daughter; the clever adventuress who was "educating" Steven; holding captive, not his senses alone, but his intelligence, as she, with her shallow gift of beauty, had not done in the fairest days of their short-lived friendship! M. Barry was with them, of course—no mother was ever more scrupulously watchful than this Irish adventurer over his girl—but him Katharine never saw. With her hand pressed closer on her companion's arm she walked quickly by, giving a cold, half-bow to Dora's husband as she passed; then turning to George Gordon, began to smile

and whisper with him just as she had done on that night when the poor backwoodsman learnt his first bitter lesson in civilization at the opera.

"That was Steven Lawrence himself—don't you remember seeing him in our box at Covent Garden, before he was engaged to Dot? He has such singular acquaintance that I never know whether I ought to speak to him or not. If it had not been for the—— person who was painting, I would have liked to take one last look at the village sisters before bidding them good-bye."

And she turned: met Steven's eyes looking after her with the look she knew so well, and felt, with sudden repentant revulsion, that all his misdeeds were condoned on the spot! Must not any man of sober sense choose to spend his time thus, rather than amidst the parade and glitter, the dressing and driving, of the Champs Elysées? Might not Steven Lawrence find greater profit in Mademoiselle Barry's society than in that of Grizelda Long and Clarendon Whyte, yet be guiltless of infidelity to Dora? If she, Katharine, held out her hand, could she not at this moment save him from the Barrys—from every dangerous influence in the world? And was it not a duty (quick as thought itself came this impulse, now that she had seen the enemy face to face) that she should, at least, make an effort towards his salvation? Pride, doubtless, forbade that she should stoop so far—but what mattered pride? This Moloch, before whom she had already sacrificed so much: this Moloch, but for whose senseless worship she might now, instead of looking forward to a starved, a barren future, be leading the wholesome country life for which nature had fitted

her: her hands full of work, her heart of love; finding pleasure, not in Parisian toilettes, but in the seed-time and the harvest, the summer's blossoming and the autumn's fading; in all the commonest sweetest joys of human life, and with the man who loved her, whose character, whatever it lacked of outward polish or fine-breeding, suited hers so utterly, at her side!

She walked through the remainder of the Louvre and home to the Hôtel Rivoli in silence that must have offended any one less devoid of personal vanity than George Gordon. Then—the Squire still happy over his rheumatism—started to pay her daily visit to Dora. "I have been thinking all this time over what you told me," she said, as Captain Gordon was leaving her at the door of the Lawrences' apartment: the *mœnad* having signified, after slight hesitation, that Madame might be visible for Mademoiselle; "so you must not wonder at my being such a stupid companion. If you see Lord Petres this evening say I wish very much to speak to him, also"—with a tremble of the voice, this—"that I am well, and have been enjoying myself in Paris."

Early though it was, Mrs. Lawrence had already a visitor—Miss Grizelda Long. A mass of sky-blue silk, silver cord, and white satin, hastily pushed aside on Katharine's entrance, was lying before the two women on the table. "And now *I* may go away!" cried Grizelda with playful affectation of jealousy, as Dot jumped up to receive her cousin: the old feeling of mutual repulsion between Katharine and the Phantom had in nowise lessened of late. "I suppose, Dora love, we may safely say that everything is settled now?"

"I suppose so," said Dora, brusquely; "but I'll send to-morrow morning and let you know for certain." Then she followed her friend to the door, exchanged a whisper or two with her at parting, and, coming back, seated herself, with a little well-acted yawn of weariness, beside Katharine.

"That good, eager, tiring, old Phantom! What a martyr I am to her! What a terribly-long ell creatures of her species do take when you have once given them an inch! Why didn't Uncle Frank come? Is Lord Petres really expected? What makes you so early to-day?"

Mrs. Lawrence was not thoroughly at her ease, and Katharine noticed it. "Papa is laid up with rheumatism, Lord Petres is really expected, and I came early because I have something especial to say to you. What is all this new finery that you and Miss Long were so intent upon? blue silk and silver, and white satin jacket . . . waistcoat . . . what is it? Dora! Is this a costume for the Phantom or for you?"

"For neither," cried Dora, promptly; and as she spoke, she rose, opened the door leading to her bedroom, and consigned the whole heap of millinery into the hands of Mademoiselle Aglaë. "There is to be a fancy-ball, for charity, and Grizelda, who, as usual, takes a part in everything, is getting me to help about some of the costumes. It was of this ball she was speaking with her accustomed absurd air of mystery, when you came in. Poor dear Grizelda! I hope when I get to her age I shall have done with all these tiring pomps and vanities!" Dot threw herself down again into her arm-chair, and clasped her tiny hands solemnly. "I've had just seven weeks of it

all now, and I assure you, honestly, I'm tired of my life and everything in it—myself most—and am quite, quite ready to go back with you and Uncle Frank to England."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Miss Fane. "It was precisely about this I wanted to speak to you. You *must* come back to England with us, Dot; I will get papa to wait another day or two, if you choose, and, while you are here, do try and make Steven go about with you, and don't be seen any more with Mr. Clarendon Whyte. I know, from authority I can't doubt, that your intimacy with him is—is talked about." Having said which, Katharine held down her face, and blushed as furiously as if she herself had been guilty.

"We discussed all this once before," said Dot, calmly;—"don't think me rude, Kate, I can't help yawning to-day—and I think I told you the exact light in which I regarded Clarendon Whyte and his friendship. Who is your authority? What can even the most malicious person find to say of me? Why, during the last week I have never been seen at all, except with you. As to making Steven go about with me more——"

"Have you tried it? Have you done your best to persuade him?" cried Katharine, as Mrs. Lawrence hesitated, and shook her head, wisely.

"I asked him this morning, Kate—woke early on purpose to speak to him before he went out—and asked him to go with us to the theatre to-night (I was afraid, from the way Uncle Frank complained yesterday, he might be laid up), and, Katharine, my dear, imagine what he answered! He had already promised—strange coincidence! to go to the Châtelet to-night

with M. Barry and his daughter, but would come round to my box during the evening. We had already had separate engagements so long that I must not be offended at his refusal. After the kindness he had received from the Barrys he could not think of breaking his word to them at the last. Now, *shall* we give up going?" said Dot, plaintively. "Wouldn't it be better to stay quietly at home, for me to spend the evening with you and Uncle Frank, than be placed in such a humiliating position as this?"

"I am not quite sure that the position *is* humiliating," was Katharine's answer. "I have been considering a great deal about all this, Dora, and the conclusion I come to is, that both you and I have judged Steven too harshly. You told me the world had only one opinion of his intimacy with Mademoiselle Barry; it seems that the world has never troubled itself about their intimacy at all! And I have seen her—I saw her with Steven in the Louvre not an hour ago—and—" the words went sorely against her heart to speak, but she brought them out steadily, generously, "she looks a quiet, simple, little English girl—not at all like the designing adventuress we have said such bitter things about. This much, at all events, I know, Steven would never come to your box from Miss Barry's unless he felt that for him to do so could be no humiliation to you."

"Well—well—perhaps we had better go, then," said Mrs. Lawrence, after narrowly watching the expression of her cousin's face. "Perhaps a woman always does make the best of a bad position by accepting, or seeming to accept it quietly. Only one favour I must ask of you, Kate—if we go—if, that is to say,

you have a chance of talking to Steven—warn the poor foolish fellow about the position he stands in, make him promise if you can (alas! you would have more influence with him than I should) to return home *at once*, with or without me, as he chooses. Will you do this, Kate, for my sake?”

“I will speak to Steven, certainly, if he gives me a chance of speaking to him,” said Katharine, rather hesitatingly. “But I don’t know why I should ask him to go away from Paris. What possible necessity can there be for him to leave before we all go? Lord Petres will be here to-night, Steven always gets on well with him, and——”

“And if I tell you that there is every reason for him to leave at once! If I tell you that his honour may be saved that way, and that way only!” exclaimed Mrs. Lawrence. “I have been told to-day—ah! how shall I put it into words? that people begin to say Steven Lawrence does not lose, perhaps, because he and M. Barry understand each other so well! Charlie Wentworth of the Blues—not left Eton a year, poor child—has lost near upon a thousand pounds at the Barrys’ house in the last two nights. Did your friend, who knows so much of Paris news, tell you that? And they say the police are getting scent of it, and any night they may be all seized—Steven and everybody. Who shall tell whether as victims or accomplices?” Mrs. Lawrence’s lips quivered with emotion.

“And who says this?” cried Katharine, after a minute’s silence; broken only by the voices of Made-moiselle Aglaë and the mœnad, babbling and shrieking, as Frenchwomen would shriek and babble upon

the brink of doom, in the other room. "Who that knows Steven Lawrence makes this monstrous assertion, and dares to repeat it to you?"

"The person who repeated it was Grizelda Long. (You do not give me your authority for the cruel things that were said of me, but I can guess it!" cried Dora, kindling. "George Gordon never loved me. Pity he's not at his favourite amusement, fighting with *men*, instead of slaying the reputation of helpless, innocent women!) Grizelda Long—and in this she acted as a friend—told me the dreadful story about Charlie Wentworth and the way poor Steven is being spoken of, and everything. You promised once to be my friend whatever happened, Kate! Hold by that promise now. Don't believe a word that cruel tongues find to say against me, and—and get Steven away from Paris, and from the Barrys' influence." And Dot covered up her face between her hands and wept.

I have said before that, following the dictates of such narrow wisdom as she possessed, Mrs. Lawrence seldom trenched further than was necessary upon absolute falsehood. If the moving of heaven and earth could get Steven out of Paris before next Thursday—only two days hence—Dora would do her best that heaven and earth should be moved. And Grizelda Long had really told her the story, units only multiplied by tens, of Charlie Wentworth's losses; Grizelda, with her usual readiness in aught that affected the sapping of a man's character, had, out of her own phantom consciousness, evoked the world's probable opinion of Steven for not being ruined! Finally, rather that her story should have artistic finish than because facts authorized the statement, Grizelda had hinted at

the likelihood of M. Barry and his friends being eventually seized by the police. All that Dot said had truth in it—leavened by just the necessary admixture of falsehood. And she was sorry in her heart that she need enlist falsehood on her side at all; sorry that she was forced to play a double part towards Katharine, whom she loved, towards Steven whom she half feared, half revered, wholly pitied! If he had been a trifle less bigoted, could only have been brought to see that the silver and blue, on the authority of Lady Sarah Adair, might be worn by a decent Christian matron, all this had been spared her! Still, the silver and blue *must* be worn. That crowning necessity submerged all smaller moralities as to means in Dot's conscience. The silver and blue must be worn; to wear it Steven must be sent away out of Paris, and the influence to send him thence was Katharine's. And in a few more days all would be over, she thought—a fresh tinge of remorse seizing her as she watched the quivering pain on Katharine's face, heard her falter out promises to do her utmost in turning aside this threatened shame from Steven! And sitting by the dull fireside at Ashcot she would have the delights of a crowning Parisian success to think over; and Steven—Katharine be none the worse for the little white lies into which circumstances had driven her for its attainment.

No thought whatever of Mr. Clarendon Whyte filled Dot's soul; no human passion, innocent or guilty; nothing but passion for the blue silk and silver cord in which her last success was to be won. Unhappily, blue silk and silver cord can, on occasion, be quite as strong a motive power for evil as was ever the love of

Cleopatra or of Helen. Stronger, perhaps, in the present great millinery epoch of the world!

CHAPTER XIV.

Reconciled.

THE morning on which Steven Lawrence met M. Barry and his daughter in the Luxembourg gardens had, as I have said, commenced an episode, destined to be no unimportant one in his history. Time pressed upon him heavily still: was he not in a city, shut away within walls from the sight of trees and sky, from the winds of heaven; above all, from the sense of personal liberty, which to a man only half-tamed like Steven, is as the very breath of life itself? But yet each day as it passed was no longer an actual enemy to be drugged, got rid of it at any cost, as in the time when accounts of his wife's balls, and when his own aimless wanderings along streets and boulevards had been his sole resource.

The shallow little sarcasm by which Dot had sought to describe his intimacy with Mademoiselle Barry had (as is often the case with shallow sarcasms) a deeper significance than the speaker supposed. In a certain sense the last three weeks had been "educating" Steven Lawrence rapidly; educating him as only the society of a refined and gifted woman can, perhaps, ever educate a man whom accident rather than incapacity has debarred from culture in his youth. Lingered by Mademoiselle Barry's side in the *Ceil de Bœuf* at Versailles, or on the spot where the Bastille fell, he had had the story of the great revolution brought before him vividly, picturesquely, as no book-

labour of his own could ever have brought it. Through her informal teaching, he had been led to see that within cities, at easels, desks, looms, pale-faced men had lived, and might be living, lives nobler, manlier (if to help on human progress be manly) than those of land-tillers in Kent, or even of hunters in the wilderness. From lips to whom the theme was one of love, had been taught dimly to discern—he, a Lawrence, and a Shilohite—what beauty shone from the Venus of Milo, the Magdalen of Veronese, in the Louvre: in fine, had stood, with uncertain feet as yet, upon the threshold of that world of intelligence and of art in which the girl herself lived. Dora was quite right. In three short weeks Mademoiselle Barry's influence had begun to "educate" Steven Lawrence.

To any softer feeling than friendship, even had Steven been a free man, it is more than doubtful that the intimacy would have led. Love is a passion so singularly little dependant upon development of intelligence, or indeed upon mental process of any kind! Mademoiselle Barry's evident liking for himself touched—I will not say, with Dot, his vanity—but his gratitude; her voice and face and pretty feminine ways made their friendship an infinitely warmer one than any friendship he could have felt for a man. He was sorry for her. With the instinctive sympathy all fine natures know for each other, divined with what repugnance this sensitive girlish heart must shrink from a life to which affection for her father bound her. Here, with gratitude, sympathy, pity, his feelings for her began and ended. Katharine Fane goes past him, smiling, on George Gordon's arm; half turns her face, blushing, softening (fairer, thinks Steven, than all

pictures or marbles in all galleries of the world), and the old madness—the sickening jealousy, the hopeless pain which yet holds in it a sweetness no pleasure can ever yield—is back upon him, and poor little Mademoiselle Barry, forgotten! Katharine Fane's influence had in very truth blotted his entire life for him: he owed his marriage to her; she had made no secret as to the side she took in his divided household; had associated with Dora's associates, had lived Dora's life, had never given him more than a cold bow, or colder word, since she came to Paris. But she had looked at him with softened, blushing face, with wistful pity in her eyes now! And in a second all the blessed summer hours in Kent; the hour when he found her, the children in her arms, upon the waste; the hour when they were alone at sunset on the sea—all the supremest golden hours of his love returned, in one great wave, across the yeoman's heart, and he forgave her. That story never could be finished, it seemed. That book *must* open at the same page to the end.

For the first time since his acquaintance with the Barrys began, Steven had been invited to dine in the Rue des Ursulines to-day. On former occasions he had either met M. Barry and his daughter at the theatre to which they were going, or had dined first with them at some modest restaurant in the neighbourhood. But to-day was an exceptional festivity, got up to celebrate Mademoiselle Barry's birthday, "a grand affair of evening costume, and a première loge de face," M. Barry said, putting his arm tenderly round his daughter, when she came in, dressed for dinner. "Katie, child, you

are looking charming! You will make quite a sensation at the Châtelet to-night."

"Charlie Wentworth of the Blues," the infatuated loser, by Grizelda Long's computation, of near upon a thousand pounds already, was the fourth member of the party, and broke out at once into such florid compliments as became his years and innocence. Steven was silent; and the girl's quiet eyes thanked him. Her beauty, if, indeed, she possessed it at all, was beauty that could never show to poorer advantage than amidst the brilliant colouring, under the glare and gaslight of a theatre: even in speaking to his daughter a too palpable note of flattery made itself heard through every word M. Barry uttered. To-night, her small pale face was paler than usual: she was dressed in sober grey silk, a black veil, pinned, mantilla-fashion, in her hair, falling round her throat and shoulders; no ornament save a bouquet of flowers, Steven's birthday gift, in her hand.

"The enemy is only a plain, badly-dressed enemy after all, Katharine," whispered Mrs. Lawrence, when Mademoiselle Barry made her appearance among the gorgeous toilettes and complexions at the Châtelet (a poor little sensitive plant in a hot-house full of flaming many-hued exotics). "What taste some people have! You see them nearly opposite us? Papa and Mademoiselle decorously in front, and Charlie Wentworth, the victim to be slain, with *my* husband in the background!" Having said which Dot straightway forgot her husband's friends, and her husband's existence, resigning herself to the pleasure—the highest her nature knew—of seeing half the glasses in the house directed to the Bébé Anglaise, the fancy, the fashion of the

hour; also of listening to the soul-thrilling murmurs of Mr. Clarendon Whyte, or any other woman-slayer of his tribe—this to Dot was matter of merest detail—who might happen to be near her during the remainder of the evening.

“Who is that English lady who looks at our box so often?” said Mademoiselle Barry, turning, when the first act was nearly over, to Steven. “The lady in white, and with a white flower in her hair. She looks like the same person who bowed to you in the gallery this morning.”

“And so she is,” answered Steven, absently. “That lady is Miss Fane, a friend—a distant connection I would say—of ours.”

“And the little girl with the fair hair and great dark eyes?”

“The little girl is Mrs. Lawrence.”

“Your—your——”

“My wife,” said Steven, with rather a short laugh. “Ah, Mademoiselle, you never knew before that I had the happiness of being married!”

Without answering a word Mademoiselle Barry turned away, and resumed her contemplation of the lamp-lit garden scene upon which the curtain was about to fall: a scene replete with those cunning effects of light and shade, those exquisitely contrasted groups in which the fairy pieces of the Châtelet excel, and which (whatever may be said of their worth, intellectually), must always possess a certain charm, a certain practical value to an artist's eyes.

Her eyes must be dim to-night, the poor child thought. She had worked too late in the gallery this afternoon, or—or the gas pained her; for stage and

audience alike, darkened boxes, and fairy palace-garden, lit with its hundred lamps, swam before her in a sort of mist. "Exert yourself to talk a little," said her father in her ear; the affectionate genial expression on his face, but a tone his daughter understood in his whisper. "Lawrence has left the box already, and the other is *not* to go away—do you hear?" Then aloud, "You look pale, you find the house too warm for you, my Katie," and as he spoke M. Barry rose and opened the door of the box. "Mr. Wentworth, will you give my daughter your arm? We shall have time to take a few turns in the foyer before the beginning of the next act."

The foyer of the Châtelet, opening out many-windowed upon its broad stone balcony, was thronged, for to-night was the first appearance this winter of Irma Marié, and the world of Paris had gone in full-dress to see her. Close beside the central opening to the boxes stood a group of Englishwomen—Mademoiselle Barry's eyes lighted on them in an instant—Dora Lawrence, Katharine Fane, Grizelda Long, with a crowd of young men, English and French, fluttering around; old Grizelda herself noteworthy for an hour as the companion of la belle Bébé. Leaning on Charlie Wentworth's arm, and with her father by her side, the poor little "enemy" walked up and down before them several times (enduring much severe scrutiny from the phantom-eyes of Miss Long and the superbly-contemptuous eye-glass of Mr. Whyte), and at last, just as the bell was ringing for the second act, Steven came up, directly in the presence of his wife and his wife's friends, and spoke to her.

"Why, Lawrence, I thought we had lost you!"

cried M. Barry, putting his hand with friendly familiarity upon Steven's shoulder. "I was just saying to Katie I was afraid you had grown tired of us and gone away."

"Not at all," answered Steven, "I have only been getting a breath of fresh air on the balcony outside, and——"

And he started, hearing his own name spoken close behind him, and turning, found himself face to face with Katharine Fane.

"I want to speak to you," she said, looking up at him earnestly. "Can you spare me five minutes? I will not detain you longer from your friends!"

Steven stopped of course; and Mademoiselle Barry, with a half-bow and a just perceptible increase of colour upon her face, walked on with her father and Charlie Wentworth in the direction of their box.

"I wanted so much to speak to you!" Katharine repeated, "and—and Dora and I thought perhaps you would not be angry if I interrupted you just for a minute or two. Will you forgive me?" And before he could answer, her hand, all in a tremble, lay within his arm.

They had never been alone together since that evening when they rode home through the December twilight from the hunting-field, and involuntarily the heart of each—here amidst the artificial glitter, the brocades, the diamond dust, the patchouli of this Parisian crowd—went back to Clithero! To a road across a dusky moorland; to lanes fresh with the wintry smell of new-ploughed earth; to a shadowy avenue, with dead leaves faintly rustling in the boughs above. "I thought you never meant to speak to me any more!"

said Katharine, very low; and "How could I tell what answer you would give me if I did?" was Steven's reply. Only this: not another word of explanation; yet they were reconciled.

Dot, who was returning to her box on the arm of Mr. Clarendon Whyte, looked back at them with a friendly little nod and smile, then disappeared in the crowd.

CHAPTER XV.

Paris by Lamplight.

It was a brilliant winter night. Cloudless and white with stars quivered the frozen sky above the lamp-lit glare, the noisy turmoil of the great city; the atmosphere was intensely clear; a sprinkle of new-fallen snow showed forth in sharpest relief the living phantasmagoria of horses, carriages, and men that swept in one everchanging, evermonotonous stream across the Place of the Châtelet.

"A different world to Clithero," said Katharine, after a long silence. "How will you and Dora be able to return to our dull village-life after the excitement both of you have been going through here?"

"Dora must answer for herself," was Steven's reply. "The only really happy hour of my Paris experiences will be the one in which I find myself starting back towards Ashcot. You must know this," he added; "you must know pretty well what kind of excitement this shut-in city-life can be to me."

They were standing, side by side, upon the balcony of the Châtelet; deserted, now that the performance had begun, by all but themselves; and Katharine's

hand had rested, till this instant, upon Steven's arm. She took it hastily away. "Papa and I have been here more than a week Mr. Lawrence, and have scarcely seen you yet! If you find no excitement in Paris, it seems to me that you have at least plenty of engagements, of *friends*:" a cruel little emphasis on that word: "to fill up your time."

"My engagements," said Steven, "consist in loitering through picture-galleries (as you saw me to-day), or idling through the streets of a morning. My friends are M. Barry and his daughter. If I had thought you wanted me, I would have been with you every day since you have been here. But you have not wanted me, Miss Katharine, and you have shown it."

There was no more possibility now than there had ever been of talking to Steven with the enigmatic circumlocution of good breeding, so Katharine found herself constrained to speak out. "And because—you have wrongly fancied that we did not wish to see you, has that been a reason why you should visit our misdeeds upon poor little Dot? a reason why you should spend your life with these persons, at whose side I have twice seen you to-day. If we have not striven to compete with them, sir, if I *have* been cold to you, when by chance we have met, it has been——"

"It has been?" said Steven, as she hesitated. "Let me hear, please, what accusation you have to bring against me."

"My accusation is that you don't care for Dot as you ought!" cried Miss Fane. "You have not been married four months, you are bride and bridegroom still, and yet you are never together, and you let Dot go where she chooses, and you spend your own time

with people who are unworthy of you" Then she stopped short.

"Those are three accusations, not one," said Steven, "and my conscience acquits me on all of them. I care for Dora, as I always did. I let her go where she chooses, because I have not the power to constrain her, and I spend my time at present with a person very much more than worthy of me."

"With M. Barry, that is to say?"

"No, with M. Barry's daughter," answered Steven, quietly. "M. Barry and I find no more to say to each other now than on the first day of our acquaintance. He is a man whose life has been passed within walls—has never handled a gun, or ridden across country in his life! has no interest beyond the gossip of the newspapers or the pavement—how the Emperor looked to day, what Bismark is reported, by private telegram, to have said yesterday—"

"And what victims M. Barry, himself, is likely to have at baccarat and écarté in the evening," interrupted Katharine. "Steven, if we are to talk to each other at all, let it be as we have always talked, frankly. You have told me, you know, that while you lived you would always speak the truth, and only the truth, to me! Of your friend, Mademoiselle Barry, I know—I wish to know nothing. Of the father, I hear just as bad things as it is possible to hear said of a man, and, for our old friendship's sake," her voice changed a little, "I warn you about him. Don't be seen with M. Barry any more, don't go to his house again. It was for this I wanted to speak to you. Come back with Dot and me and see papa this evening, instead of

remaining with the Barrys. Now I ask—I beg this of you, as a favour to myself. Will you refuse me?”

“I have no right, I feel, to advise you,” she went on, as Steven did not answer, “no right to request anything of you now. Once, long ago, I think perhaps you would not have refused a request of mine—but that time is over. I know very well that it is not I who ought to be saying this to you now, but Dora and you live divided lives, and so I thought—thought you would forgive me, at least, if I spoke. People are saying things I cannot bear to hear about your intimacy with M. Barry, and what we want is that you should go back to England at once, and let papa and me bring Dot with us. At all events, don’t go to their house any more—promise me you won’t! Don’t even be seen again in their box to-night!”

For a minute Steven stood irresolute. “Ask me anything else,” he said at length. “I will go back to England when you choose—to-morrow—only too gladly. I am engaged, have been engaged for days, to spend this evening at M. Barry’s house. Mademoiselle Barry is the only friend I’ve made in Paris, remember, and, even with you bidding me, I don’t see how I could pay back her kindness with discourtesy at the last.”

“Oh, as you choose,” said Katharine, growing frigid in an instant at Steven’s kindly mention of the enemy. “I see that I over-estimated the influence an old friendship might have over you still! But at least I have done what Dora wished in warning you. M. Barry is spoken of openly as an adventurer and a card-sharper. At any hour may be exposed, they say, with his *friends*, by the police. Remain his associate or not, as you choose. Perhaps you will take me back

to poor Dora now. I have kept you too long already from the society that gives you pleasure."

She put her hand within his arm again. The touch, cold and distant though it was, thrilled through Steven's heart. "Tell me what I am to do!" he exclaimed, "and you know that I will obey you. What are the Barrys—what is all the world compared to the chance of offending you? I am not to speak to Mademoiselle Barry any more? Very well. She will call me unmannerly, ungrateful, with justice. So long as you forgive me, will let me be with you, what does it matter? Miss Fane—Katharine, shall we go back to the days when I used to walk with you in summer? No—not to those, I'm a fool, I don't know what I am saying—to that last night when I rode back with you from Stourmouth to the Dene! You have not forgotten it?"

"We can go back to nothing," said Katharine, very low. "Every day of our lives dies, with all its folly, and is buried as it passes, and it's best so! I am not the same Katharine Fane who walked with you in summer, you must know." She tried, with indifferent success, to laugh. "I have grown older and wiser; cured, I hope, of some of my faults even!" Then, "Oh, Steven!" with a sudden outburst of repentance, she cried, "I was wrong! I spoke unjustly in what I said just now—forgive me. You will return home with Dot and me to our hotel, but of course you must go and say good-bye to Mademoiselle Barry. I was unjust—have been a little unjust towards you, I think, in my heart ever since we came to Paris, and I repent of it! I ask you to forgive me. All I claim—all I can ever claim—is a sister's right, remember, to care for your happiness, and for Dora's."

"Happiness!" repeated Steven, under his breath. "Ah! that is a word it doesn't do to talk about now. When happiness does come to me it is by snatches like this—ten minutes after weeks of such a life as mine has been since I saw you last! Sometimes I think," he went on, "that people like Clarendon Whyte, or poor little Dora, have the best of it. Coats and waistcoats make the one happy; silks and ribbons and her mock-fine brougham the other. And they dress and dine and dance, and know neither deeper pains nor higher pleasures till they die! Pity she married me!" he cried; all this more as if he were unconsciously speaking aloud than addressing Katharine: "she would have been happier with any other man than with me, and but for her I would have sold the farm, and gone back to old Klaus in the backwoods, the only life suited to me, long ago."

"Gone back to the woods!" repeated Katharine. "Sold Ashcot! Ah, you know very well you are not saying this in earnest. As if Ashcot would ever pass away from the hands of the Lawrences!"

"If I had not married it would have passed from mine," said Steven. "When I came home from America I had set one hope, one desire, before my eyes, and if I had gained *that*, life on the old farm—hard as it is for a man to get a living out of his land—would have made me more than contented. As it is——"

"As it is you have your work, you have yourself to think of, just the same!" interrupted Katharine. "Should a man let his life be spoilt through one misadventure, the shipwreck of one foolish hope? Does any man possess exactly what he once dreamt, in his

blindness, would have suited him? In time Dora and you will grow liker of mind than you are now. She will go back, poor little Dot, stronger to endure the country after the tonic of all this Paris gaiety, and then——”

A burst of military stage music, a tumultuous clapping of hands, reached them at this instant from the interior of the theatre. Some jest of “Hur-luberlu’s,” some misadventure of “Jolicoco’s” in the fairy piece setting all its Parisian spectators into childish ecstasies of amusement.

“While we live our lives will be as much apart as our thoughts are at this moment,” said Steven, calmly. “And, for Dora certainly, the best thing that could happen would be for me to go back even now to the woods and to my old mate there. A man of my age is too old to educate. There is the truth of it. Only one influence could ever have really changed me, and that I’ve missed. The story is told.”

“I thought Mademoiselle Barry had been ‘educating’ you, as you call it,” said Katharine. “I thought, from what Dot told me, that you were beginning to care for pictures and statues, and historical associations, and I know not what besides, under Mademoiselle Barry’s influence?”

“Mademoiselle Barry has taught me enough to show me that I know nothing,” answered Steven. “Enough to make me see, as I never did before, my proper place in the world. Miss Katharine,” he turned to her abruptly; “why did you never teach me how ignorant I was? With Mademoiselle Barry I feel at every minute how much other men have read, and thought, and done. With you——”

"With me you certainly were never made to feel that!" said Katharine, quickly. "I am too stupid, have read too little myself, ever to make another person conscious of his intellectual defects."

"With you," he answered, "I felt that I, Steven Lawrence, could become . . . just what Katharine Fane chose to make of me! There was part of my madness. I was ignorant, and yet—how was it? five minutes of that ignorance seemed to raise me higher than all the learning I can go through again while I live!"

M. Barry looked up, as Steven entered the box, with all his accustomed obsequious friendliness, making room for him at once behind his daughter's chair. "I was only waiting for your return to go," whispered the girl, as Steven leaned forward to speak to her. "Poor papa thought it would be such a treat for me to go to the theatre, for once, like a grand lady, in a box on the first tier, but no performance has ever given me so little pleasure as Cendrillon. Papa, when you are ready, I am. If we leave at once we shall be able to get out before the crush begins."

She rose, drew her mantilla close round her tired pale face, then leaning, for the last time in her life, on Steven Lawrence's arm—Charlie Wentworth, in keeping of M. Barry, in front—left the box. "You return with us, I suppose?" she said to Steven, when they had walked together for a minute in silence. "M. de Vitrou, the Chevalier, and half-a-dozen others are coming to do honour to my birthday;" a palpable bitterness changing her voice at the word "honour."

"I'm afraid I shall have to say good-bye to you at

the door of the theatre," answered Steven. "By to-morrow evening I find that I shall be able to start for England, and to-night I must return home early. Ah, Mademoiselle," he added, "how shall I ever thank you enough for your kindness, for the good you have done me during the last three weeks?"

She lifted her eyes, the honest girlish eyes, quite steadily to his. "What does this mean?" she said. "What have you heard about us? Tell me—I would rather hear it from your lips, and *now!* Don't be afraid of hurting me. You will do me a greater favour by speaking frankly than by silence, I assure you."

"I have heard," said Steven, gravely, "what concerns myself, and myself alone, and while I live I shall remember your kindness to me with gratitude."

Perfect respect, a great, a chivalrous gentleness was in his voice; but the blood flushed up in a hot tide over Mademoiselle Barry's face. "And papa? Shall you remember papa as you will me? I would rather not be well thought by anyone who would not think the same of him. If I had known you longer," she went on, hurriedly, "I would have told you more of the troubles of poor papa's life—his poverty, his ill-fortune—things that the world will never know, will never take into account; but you would have believed me if I had told them to you?"

"I should believe you as I would believe my own soul," said Steven, pressing the poor little hand that trembled on his arm; "and I shall remember your father simply as I have found him. Of that you may be quite sure."

"Thank you. I have been very glad to know you, Mr. Lawrence! We have spent some pleasant

hours together, haven't we? Whatever may be true of others, *you* have not been much the worse, remember, for knowing us, and—and"—in a frightened whisper this—"I am glad, more glad than I can tell you, that you are not coming back to our house to-night. If I had dared I would have told you before not to come, but I was too much ashamed, and . . . well, no matter. It's all over now. Papa dear—" they were at the door of the theatre, and as she spoke she quitted Steven, and went over fondly, bravely, to her father's side—"Mr. Lawrence finds he cannot come back with us to-night. He has got some unexpected news, and returns to England to-morrow."

For an instant an expression such as Steven had once or twice already seen at the card-table disturbed the equanimity of the Irishman's handsome face. It lasted an instant only. Then remembering young Wentworth's presence—touched perhaps by the piteous quiver of his daughter's lips—M. Barry held out his hand to Steven, wished him good-bye, hoped they would meet again; at all events, if there would really be no time for leave-taking to-morrow? their good friend must promise to write. Katie was a capital correspondent; a letter addressed to them, *Poste Restante*, Paris, would reach them anywhere. A minute later and father and daughter, Charlie Wentworth in close attendance, were walking away, across the snow-covered pavement, towards a stand of carriages, about fifty yards distant, down the boulevard.

Steven stood and watched Mademoiselle Barry's figure until it was lost—with a feeling of genuine regret he recognised this: lost for ever—out of his sight; then turned, lighter in spirit than he had been

for weeks past, and made his way quickly towards Dora's box. And meanwhile, hidden back in the corner of the fiacre, the poor little girl herself feels that her heart is breaking! Hot tears, beyond her powers of control at last, roll down her forlorn white face; in a passion of pain she clasps her flowers, Steven's birthday gift, upon her breast. So men and women part from each other every day. To one an acquaintance has been a pleasant episode; to the other a beginning and an end—a tide-mark, after sinking from whose level life shall stagnate on, dull and sunless, to the end. If, instead of the neatly-rounded reciprocal passions of three-volume fiction, the crude *unfinished* love-stories of all hearts could be made known, I wonder which of the world's imperial libraries would have space to hold the romances that might be written!

Nothing could be prettier than Dot's smile of welcome to her husband when he came round to her box. What! all going back together to drink tea with Uncle Frank? How delightful! How incomparably better than any of those vapid monotonous champagne-suppers she had grown so weary of! The Phantom and Mr. Clarendon Whyte were obliged to go their own road when the party divided at the door of the theatre; the former bearing Mrs. Lawrence's excuses to Lady Sarah Adair, who, it seemed, had some kind of friendly reception (was it a rehearsal?) to-night.

"Receptions, balls, what do I care for them?" says Dot, as she sits by the fire drinking her tea, and believing, from her inmost soul, in this part of domestic virtue that she is acting. "Dear Uncle Frank,

this is the happiest evening, *really*, that I have spent since I left Clithero! Steven saved out of the hands of the Philistines (and M. Barry has a wicked face, Steven; I watched him particularly through my opera-glasses), and our return home comfortably settled, and everything. I feel that I shall never want to leave Ashcot again, or not for a year at least. Paris is very well. It would be insincerity for me to say I don't like Paris, but home is better. What will Barbara say when she sees us? I must buy a plain stuff gown for her as I go through London—if I searched Paris I should find no fit present for Barbara—and dear Aunt Arabella! How good to think that this day week we may all be sitting round the fire together at the Dene!"

With Mrs. Lawrence in these admirable dispositions, the plans for return were easily settled. Kate, of course, said the Squire, must stay in Paris a day or two longer to see Lord Petres—just allowing Dora time to pack up her thousand-and-one dresses, and say good-bye to her friends; but there could be no reason why Steven might not start at once in order to have things ready for her at Ashcot. And so, Dot having interposed a parenthesis of regret about her husband travelling alone, it was finally arranged Steven should go by to-morrow night's tidal train (it would leave Paris at half-past seven, said Dot, thereby proving herself, to every one's surprise, well versed in the details of Bradshaw), and the rest of the party follow, if Dora's leave-taking and bill-paying were completed, on Saturday.

"And now," cried Mrs. Lawrence, looking with a little yawn at the timepiece, and putting her hand

affectionately on Steven's shoulder, "it is quite time for us to go. Half-past eleven! We must begin to get ourselves out of these horrible dissipated city hours"—she had not got to her bed before three, at the earliest, for many weeks past—"and I must be up early to-morrow to pack Steven's things. Ah, how strange it will seem to be alone, even for a day, in this big, big Paris without him!"

Mr. Hilliard offered, as a matter of course, to send out for a fiacre; but of this piece of extravagance Mrs. Lawrence would not bear. Was not her opera-cloak hooded and lined with swandown? Had she not over-shoes? had not her extravagance, her foolish extravagance, she was ready to own her faults, already led into more than enough expense? No, not if Uncle Frank paid for the carriage, would Mrs. Lawrence do anything but walk. It was the *principle* of economy which she meant, from this hour forth, to cultivate. The night was fine, the ground hard. It would be a treat, a treat! cried Dot, the tears rising in her eyes, to have this starlight walk—the last walk, most likely, that she would take in Paris—alone with Steven.

She hung fondly upon his arm; she prattled, as they walked along, about Barbara and Ashcot, and how Steven was to have the parlour arranged (if possible see about that long-talked of piano from Canterbury), and what there must be for breakfast on the morning of her arrival. And all this time the blue and silver dress, the triumphs of to-morrow night, floated like celestial visions before her brain. Fate, she felt, had smiled upon her efforts. She had managed everything excellently. Steven was to go to-morrow, saved by her agency from the clutches of those Irish adven-

turers! She would slip quietly off, nobody the wiser, to her ball a couple of hours or so after his departure; and then—good-bye to Paris, and to toilettes, and to Clarendon Whyte! Good-bye to life, and back to Ashcot, where she must try to endure existence, try even to be a better wife to this poor confiding Steven, if she could.

Clinging tight to the strong arm that upheld her, Mrs. Lawrence tripped, as fast as her little feet would carry her, along the frozen snow, thinking all this, yet still not without remorse for the part she was forced to play stirring at intervals in her morsel of a conscience. "If Steven had but been less prejudiced," she mused, regretfully, "had let me accept the invitation openly, offered to go with me, behaved in any way like a reasonable being, how much I should have been saved! The falsehoods half the world tells are due, I'm certain, if we could look into the cause of things, to the mistaken prejudices of the other half!"

So Dora moralized.

CHAPTER XVI.

Lady Sarah's Masquerade.

ALL the next day she kept discreetly within doors, and denied herself to visitors. How could she care to talk to strangers on this last day her Steven would be with her? She spoke of their separation as if it were to last for months rather than days; insisted upon packing his portmanteau with her own hands; upon seeing to his buttons; Barbara should not be able to say she had had no time for useful work in Paris; as evening drew on, came often to his side, clung to him, kissed

him with a warmth that Steven, hereafter, held to be blackest proof of her guilt.

"It was all planned," he would say bitterly. "In heart she had betrayed me already, and, Judas-like, sealed the betrayal with a kiss. A better woman would have had self-respect enough to avoid that part of the business at all events."

And yet Dora, in very truth, throughout that day had no guiltier dreams than of blue taffetas, silver cord, and velvet, in her heart! Steven was leaving her free, and she was glad; Steven was being deceived, and she was sorry. And weakly wavering—she had not weight for vigorous oscillation—between these two emotions, she packed his portmanteau, or sewed on his buttons one minute; then clung to him, kissed him, tried to hope, even if she were found out, he would not be very angry with her for her falsehood, at the next! And then Dot *must* act, in whatever situation of life she was placed; necessity impossible for a man like Steven to recognise; must pose, and think of effect, even with no larger audience than herself. Going about from room to room with pale cheeks and straight hair (the hair-dresser was ordered for nine); sewing on buttons; jumping up and down on portman-teaus to make them lock; embracing Steven; asking his forgiveness for her extravagance . . . in all this Dora was but enacting her small version of the kind of domestic repentance she had so often seen on the Parisian stage to the best of her ability?

"And what shall you do with yourself this evening?" asked Steven, as she clung to his hand at parting. "Order a carriage, and go round to the Hôtel

Rivoli, I hope. You will be moped to death sitting here alone by yourself."

"I—if I feel better, perhaps I may go out!" said Dot, with downcast eyes. "At present all I feel inclined for is a good long cry, and then to put my head upon my pillow and rest."

In saying which she spoke, for the moment, absolute truth. As tears, however, would have had the effect of spoiling her looks, she kept them heroically back; contenting herself with standing full five minutes at the window from whence she had watched the fiacre bear her husband away through the lamp-light; after this, instead of resting her head upon her pillow, consigned it to the hands of M. Alphonse, from whence, at the end of three-quarters of an hour, it emerged frizée, gold-powdered, radiant under its little velvet toquet. "Une belle et gracieuse tête de Rubens," said M. Alphonse, stepping back, and clasping admiring hands before his work; for M. Alphonse was a man of artistic culture. Whereupon, Mademoiselle Aglaë, and the *mœnad* cry, "Oui, oui! Superbe! Magnifique!" in admiring chorus; and Dora's husband, Dora's last faint qualms of conscience, are forgotten. The first round of applause, no matter whether from the gallery or the stalls, have reached the ears of the actress, and everything belonging to the world without—the world of actual dull reality, beyond the rouge, and gold-dust, and foot-lights, in which her soul delights—has passed away.

At half-past ten came a ring at the door of the apartment, and Grizelda Long, cloaked and hooded, entered the little disordered salon, where, three or four minutes later, Mrs. Lawrence joined her.

"Bring in a light, Aglaë," cried Dot. "Turn on the gas, and let us see how we look reflected from all the different glasses. Grizelda, dear, take off your cloak, and let me see you. Oh! . . . very nice, indeed! Now, how do you like my dress? Do you think the most malicious person could say that there was anything wrong in my wearing it?"

Mademoiselle Aglaë had by this time turned on the gas, and Dot stood directly under its light, before one of the long console glasses which lined the walls of the salon. It would be difficult to imagine a more charming picture than the little creature made, in the long-coveted blue and silver of her page-dress. Her tiny hands and feet, her short fair hair, her little round throat, might have belonged, in truth, to the child of twelve she was designed to personify; and her face, with its marvellous white-and-pink complexion and lustrous dark eyes, seemed to have gained a freshness, a bizarre grace, under this boyish travesty, that even the critical eyes of Grizelda Long could not but recognise.

"You look very well, my dear; and of course the propriety or non-propriety of wearing such a dress must, as I told you from the first, depend upon one's own moral sense. I don't know that I would have worn it myself, but then, you see, my dear mother brought us up *so* austere!" (at odd times the Phantom would throw out these vague claims to human kinship) "so very austere—and I myself have such a dread of men ever thinking a woman unfeminine!" And upon this Grizelda's great eyes stole to a reflection of herself in the glass, with an expression of kittenish modesty that Dot took off to the life an hour or two

later, with three or four appreciative friends for audience, and Lady Sarah Adair's boudoir for a stage.

The subject of Grizelda's probable costume had been one freely discussed among Grizelda's acquaintance during the last fortnight: Miss Miggs, Mrs. Squeers, one of the witches in *Macbeth*, the *Veiled Prophet*, the *Wandering Jew*: these were a few only out of the varied *répertoire* which Dora, Mr. Clarendon Whyte, and other of Grizelda's more intimate friends had made out for her. And in what costume, after all, do you suppose Grizelda had arrayed herself? As a "*Bergère à la Watteau*"—to use the correct technicality of the milliners. Her sparse, unlovely hair, combed boldly from the gaunt temples, plastered, powdered, surmounted by a tiny wreath of opening rosebuds: her lank arms bared to the elbows; her dress of brocaded silk looped so as to show her poor old feet and ankles; ill-adjusted rouge heightening the angularity of her faded cheeks; a patch coquettishly set at the spot where a dimple should have been—but was not. In this guise was a woman to whom the world was no stage, but bitterest reality; a woman who, with sordid care, must pinch herself for months to pay for all these gewgaws, about to present herself before two hundred and fifty spectators at a Parisian masquerade!

"Your husband is gone, I *conclude*?" she remarked, when—Dot wrapped from head to foot in a cloak—they were driving rapidly along the *Champs Elysées*. "Mr. Lawrence has been able to tear himself from his friends, the Barrys, at last?"

"Yes, he is gone," said Dot; "he left before I began to dress, to go by the half-past seven train, and

I am to follow, with my uncle and cousin, in a day or two. Ah, heaven, Grizelda!" she exclaimed, as a horrible possibility for the first time struck her, "if he—if Steven was to be too late! He said something about our clocks being all wrong just before he left."

Dot's heart beat quick under her spangled satin doublet. She put her face close to the window, gazing out with a sort of childish horror upon every carriage that passed her on the road. "If—if Steven was to be too late!" she murmured under her breath.

"Well, and what if he was?" said Grizelda, sharply. At the moment when she and Dot stood side by side under the light, a sense, such as she had never felt before, of Mrs. Lawrence's levity had entered Grizelda's soul. "I hope you don't mean to say you are ashamed of what you are doing? If Mr. Lawrence did miss the train, and find that you have been to a ball at one of the best houses in Paris, what dreadful harm would be done?"

"He would kill me, I think. Just that," said Dot. "If he saw me in this dress he would kill me."

"A cheerful suggestion!" said Grizelda, laughing the Phantom laugh. "My dearest Dora, why in the world didn't you come as Fatima? It would have been much the fittest character for the wife of such a Bluebeard."

"I wish I hadn't come at all," said Dora. "I wish I was with Steven. I wish——"

But at this moment their carriage stopped before the entrance of Lady Sarah Adair's house. She heard the distant sound of a waltz; saw the quick-moving shadows that floated to and fro across the windows of

the ball-room on the first floor; and once again Steven, and her own remorse for the part of folly that she was playing, were forgotten.

It was now close upon eleven o'clock; and, precisely as Marie de Medicis and her page floated amidst murmurs of applause into the ball-room, Steven Lawrence was walking home to his lodgings in the Champs Elysées. He *had* been one minute too late for the train; an untoward mischance brought about chiefly by Dora's unconquerable emotion at parting from him; and finding that the earliest train by which he could start would be the Calais mail next morning, had left his luggage at the terminus, and at once walked back to spend the evening at the Hôtel de Rivoli. Dora he fully thought to meet there, for it was impossible to him to believe in her intention of spending an evening alone and in tears; but Dora, as you know, had other employment on hand. Expecting, however, that she would appear before long, the Squire made Steven sit down and play draughts with him beside the fire, Katharine opposite them with her embroidery; and in this quiet fashion, with cheerful talk over plans for the approaching spring at Clithero, the evening passed quickly by. At eleven Steven rose and took his leave. It was evident, after all, that Dora's headache had been no feigned one—evident that she had indeed condemned herself voluntarily to spend an evening in her own society; and as he walked along the Champs Elysées on his way home, Steven's heart softened at the remembrance of her face as he had last seen it, disconsolately leaning over the head of the stairs to watch his departure! He thought how he would go in softly to her room, watch that tear-stained face a

minute upon its pillow, then hear her childish babble of surprise and pleasure as she awoke and heard him tell the story of his stupidity in missing the train. And even as he thought this, reached the door of his house and gave a gentle monosyllabic ring at the outer bell.

The porter admitted him without question as usual; and Steven ran three steps at a time up to the *entresol*, where, after some minutes' delay, the old French servant, sleepy-eyed, and with her cotton handkerchief tied awry on the top of her head, opened about three inches of the door, and peered out at him.

"Monsieur!" she cried, almost dropping the hastily-lighted lamp out of her hand. "Mais, Monsieur, est déjà de retour?"

Steven passed by her into the little dark drawing-room, and the *mœnad*, following on his heels, lit one of the gas-burners from her own lamp, then retired outside to listen. Mademoiselle Aglaë was sufficiently in her mistress's counsels to know that Monsieur was ignorant of the projected masquerade. Mademoiselle Aglaë and the *mœnad* had talked the matter over, with freest expansion of sentiment, with amplest gloze of French colouring respecting cause and effect. And now—now it was evident to the *mœnad* mind the catastrophe had arrived! Monsieur departs on his journey; Madame departs to her amusement; Monsieur returns unexpectedly,—“and paff!” says the *mœnad* half-aloud, and with a little snap of her black fingers, “’tis finished.” Would he rage, explode with the god dams, the violence of his barbaric nation, or what?

He laid down his hat, walked quietly up to the cold hearth, and stood there. The drawing-room, as

I have before said, opened into Dora's bed-room: the door of communication stood an inch or so open; and Steven felt—his senses gave him as yet no evidence one way or the other—that his wife was not there. The salon, as was its wont, bore evidence of having been made to serve as a dressing-room. A tiny slipper lay here, a glove, a morsel of ribbon, a shred of silver cord there; the mingled odours of half-a-dozen unguents and essences made the air oppressive as the air of a barber's shop. He stood quiet for more than a minute; then, instead of going into the bed-room at once, walked across the salon half-whistling, with his hands thrust into his pockets, and began to examine a picture—he must have seen it a hundred times before—that hung upon the opposite wall. It was a French line engraving of the good old vapid school of Regnault and Vidal. A lady in classically spare drapery simpering, with downcast face, over an open letter that she holds in her hand, while with the other she caresses a simpering lap-dog; a servant-woman looking over her shoulder, simpering; a page, his face half in light half in shadow, simpering at the door; fruits and flowers upon the tapestry-covered table; upon the floor a leash of partridges and a leveret. A picture bearing the name of "Le Cadeau," telling no story whatsoever of human suffering or happiness, nothing but the most insipid record of insipid every-day life. Yet Steven stood before it motionless, examined it as if his life depended upon unravelling its meaning; only turned away when the striking of a clock at his elbow told him that a quarter of an hour had already passed since he entered the room. . . . Long afterwards, in fever and delirium, the

faces of that lady and page will live before and torture his brain,—just as a tune played on a barrel-organ will torture the memory of a man who heard rather than listened to it in some bygone moment of impending danger or of loss . . .

He took up a hand-lamp from the table, lit it at the gas, and passed on into his wife's room. It was vacant: that he knew. The disordered state of the dressing-table and floor showed that Dora had gone as usual to a ball: that he expected. Her tears, her contrition over their past estrangement, her resolves for the future, had been so much clever acting—no more. He went up to her dressing-table, left in chaos by Mademoiselle Aglaë, who immediately after her mistress's departure had betaken herself to her own engagements for the evening, and there lay, so exquisitely repaired that the effects of his own act of violence were scarce discernible—M. Valentin's sketch. The hair-dresser had required it as a model wherèby to execute his "Rubens' head," and for the first time during the past fortnight, for the first time since the conspiracy was set afoot, Dot had forgotten to put it safe under lock and key before she left.

Well, Steven neither tore the sketch a second time, nor uttered the barbaric oaths of his nation, nor showed signs of violence of any sort or kind. He merely stood—somewhat pale, remarked the mœnad who still followed and was stealthily watching him through the half-open door—pale, and as if he were not quite determined yet what to think or do. As well for *her* to make friends with some one before the crash came, decided the mœnad, half-frightened, half-delighted at seeing in real life the kind of play she had

so often peered at through the gallery-rails of the Banlieue theatres: and with a sniff and a cough, meant, palpably, to be one of sympathy, she approached. "Yes, yes, it was indeed like that Madame had departed, like a pretty little young man, as Monsieur saw, and another person had come to seek her, and——"

"Allez!" said Steven ("d'une voix terrible," the mœnad observed, when enacting the scene next day for Mademoiselle Aglaë), and without turning his head. Upon which, muttering and shaking her head, the old woman crept away to her own lair under the kitchen dresser, her own speculations as to what would be likely to occur when Madame should return, and he was left alone.

Alone, Reader, do you know the fullest meaning of that word? Alone, with only the steepled tongues of the great city meting out, multiplying his loneliness; with the snow and wind of the February midnight beating upon the window-pane; with a shame disproportioned, one may say, to the occasion—what, indeed, had the man discovered? that his wife had gone in a dress, more or less indecorous, to a fashionable masquerade—for companionship. One, two, three o'clock struck, but still Dora did not return; and at last, wearied out, Steven left off pacing such limited number of feet as the salon possessed, and throwing himself down into an arm-chair beside the cold hearth, fell almost instantly into a kind of heavy sleep.

Cold? ay, it was cold indeed, but no wonder. He was camping out with Klaus, and the cries of the goatsuckers told him that the chilliest hour of the night,

the hour before sunrise, was at hand. "Take heed by my story, by my sorry bit of experience," said the old man, looking across at him in the flicker of the fire-light. "Take heed that the eyes do not lie every time they look at you—that the smile is yours indeed, the hand" "The dress is a perfect little dress, dearest," says Dot, kneeling by him, and looking up (Klaus, the dark forest back-ground, still there) into his face; "but of course I would not wear it against *your* wishes. . . ."

And then a great storm rose; and Klaus and Dora were both shut out from his sight. Colder and colder grew the night. He heard a low confused roar, stretched out his hand—with the old mechanical movement, to clasp his gun,—and waking with a start knew where he was. The roar was of the wintry blast in the avenue without: there lay the ribbons, the silver cord upon the table; there were the lady and the page simpering from their frame upon the wall. A sickly minglement of barber's perfumes, not the balmy freshness of the forest-side, met his senses.

Five o'clock struck, just now, from the distant city clocks, and almost at the same instant came the sound of approaching wheels, of fast-flying horses' feet, down the silent Champs Elysées. A few minutes later and Dot, admitted by the drowsy porter, was tripping, as lightly as limbs stiff and weary with dancing could trip, up the stairs; half-singing as she went the last galop that had been played at Lady Sarah Adair's ball. Steven, and her vague fear of Steven's anger, the recollection that this was to be her last Parisian triumph, of the questionable means by which she had attained it—these and all other disagreeable subjects

were very far from Dot now. She *had* been the prettiest woman in the room; Clarendon Whyte, a dozen Clarendon Whytes had been at her feet. She could still hear the murmurs of admiration that followed her as she moved from room to room; could read the story of her success on poor old Grizelda's face as a pair of phantom eyes watched her from solitary corners of the ball-room, or peered down from unexpected eyries about staircases; could feel the rapture of that moment of moments when M. Valentin, a hundred spectators standing by, had asked permission to take a sketch of her; "A few lines only—just to remind him by how far the fresh and graceful original surpassed the poor conception of her embodied in his own first drawing." "But I am very willing, if always it is worth the trouble," cries Dot, for when she is most interested in her little parts the creature acts them aloud, even to herself. And as she speaks she opens the outer lock of the apartment with her latch-key, skips in, the same expression on her face that it had worn for M. Valentin's benefit; and with a start of horror sees a bright gleam of gas proceeding from the half-opened door of the salon.

For a moment her heart seemed to stop beating; then she walked falteringly on; entered, and saw her husband. She gave a cry and stopped short. "Steven, I—I never meant to go! they over-persuaded me. Oh Steven, forgive me!"

He answered not a word, but something in his eyes bade her come up close—close under the gas, where he could see her full, and Dora obeyed. She had been a fresh and graceful picture in the artistic sight of M. Valentin; the prettiest woman present to

connoisseurs, English and French, accustomed to the high-rouged beauties of Parisian ball-rooms. To Steven she was hideous. More hideous than any tinsel-dressed ghost,

"With lips as much too white as the streak
Lay far too red on each hollow cheek,"

that had ever made his heart bleed as a boy in the streets of the gold cities. She looked jaded and worn; her paint most like paint, most unlike life; her eyes unnaturally large, and with the bluish shade of art horribly visible upon their lower lids. As she approached him the fumes of wine, of punch, mingling with the stale perfumes of patchouli and mille-fleurs, overcame him with a sense of bodily sickening repugnance.

"I couldn't withstand the temptation. I'll give my whole life to make amends." And she held out her trembling little hands, in their soiled torn gloves, towards him.

"Don't touch me," he said drawing back, but not taking his eyes a second from her figure. And in the tone of voice in which he spoke those three words Dora knew her fate: fathomed not his agony of self-abasement: *that* she could never know: but his scorn, his abhorrence of herself. Ashcot (in a second that threat of his returned, with prophetic augury to her heart) would be no place for a lady who had gone, in male attire and against her husband's wishes, to a Parisian masquerade!

"It's done, and there's no use in tragedy-scenes now," she cried, turning from him with a shame that the eyes of two hundred indifferent spectators had not engendered in her, and crouching down on a low

stool beside the fire-place. "If you hadn't been so harsh when I showed you the sketch you wouldn't have forced me into all this deceit. However, it's done and there's an end of it."

"Ay," said Steven slowly, and turning so that he could watch her still: for something in that travestied figure, that haggard painted face, that living evidence—so he took it—of his own sullied honour, seemed to possess a ghastly attraction for him; "it's all over. What is your object, if for once you can speak the truth, in coming back here to-night?"

"I—I think I might ask that question," said Dora, with a sickly attempt at a smile. "What is your object in coming back here to-night? I thought you were half-way home by this time, Steven."

"Half-way *where*?"

"Half-way to Ashcot. Oh, don't look at me so! What have I done that I musn't call Ashcot, home? Take pity on me! I am weak; I have no one but you. What have I done that you should speak to me in such a voice?"

"You have done," said Steven, without a trace of passion as yet, "what I have no doubt is a common enough thing for women in your fashionable world to do; have deceived, dishonoured a husband that trusted you. You might have done it, Dora," he went on, "might have sunk even to this!" as he spoke his eyes took in every detail of her dress with an expression of loathing I have no words to render, "and yet have degraded yourself somewhat less, I think. There was no need to treble your shame by all the kisses, all the kind words you gave me to-day."

Then Dora lifted up her face and spoke out boldly

"You are cruel, you are unjust!" she cried. "Turn me out of your house—do as you like. I know pretty well what mercy I've got to expect. I know how you turned Dawes out to starve at Ashcot. You have a nature of stone. You can make no allowance for faults, for temptations that are not yours. I did kiss you to-day, I did give you kind words, and at the time I was sincere. Because I have not exactly your Methodist opinions, because I have not exactly your conscience (elastic sometimes,) your ideas of right and wrong, I am to be treated as if I had committed a crime. Oh, narrow heart! If you would open your arms to me now, and forgive me, I would be faithful to you till my life's end. You might take me at this moment, at white heat, and bend me into whatever form you chose. But you will not—you will not!"

"No, as God it my witness I will not!" exclaimed Steven, the tremor of rising passion in his voice. "Take you in my arms, dressed as you are, coming from the scenes you come from—you, my wife? No; to such dishonour I have not sunk. I've borne a good deal," he went on, "and till to-night have thought you honest. I'm a Methodist—you are right. I'm narrow-minded, hard, may be, of nature as you say; at all events your life and your associates, and your hours, and everything belonging to you here in Paris, have been repugnant to me. But I've borne with them, for I've thought you honest. 'She would not lay her head beside my pillow, and deceive me,' I've thought, when common sense at times has bade me distrust you. 'Her heart is pure. Her follies are those of a child.' And I've forgiven you—reverenced you; do you hear that? reverenced you till to-night; and it's all over now.

You are no more to me than any woman I may chance to meet in the streets. Lead your own life, where—with whom you choose. I shall never blame you again."

"Steven, Steven! don't say that!" she cried, starting up wildly. "Don't say it. You don't know what you say—what temptation you thrust upon me. Oh, I am not wicked. I am not what you think me! I'll go to Kate in the morning and take her hand, and swear, looking into her face and yours, that I have never done a worse thing than going to this wretched ball. It was a temptation to me such as you could never understand. M. Valentin made the drawing look so exquisite, and there wasn't another grown person in Paris, they said, who could fill the character but me; and then every costume in the room was designed by artists, you know! It isn't a question of sentiment at all, Steven, if you would only see it so, but of art."

Steven laughed; a laugh by no means good to listen to. "I've heard a great deal of this tall talk already," he remarked, "and I see pretty clear what it ends in. When I told you that the dresses and the dancing of your Parisian ball-rooms were indecent, I was silenced by hearing that 'those were the usages of the world.' When I warned you against your intimacy with different women of your acquaintance, I heard that people 'whom society countenanced' I had no business to find fault with. I see you, to my shame, in a dress that unsexes and degrades you, and I'm told it's not a question 'of sentiment but of art.' Later on—my God that I should speak of such things!—later on, if I was fool enough to keep you with me, I should wake some morning to a lower depth yet,

and be told, probably, it was a question 'not of morality, but of fashion.' No, Dora, no. I wish, heaven is my witness, I wish to do my duty to you still; but the same roof can cover us two no more. Take your liberty, use it as you choose and forget me! It is the best thing that can happen to us both."

He turned from her, and began to pace up and down the room as he had done while all this was passing through his mind during the silent hours of the night: and his wife watched him. Such a contrast as they formed! Steven's big figure, in the rough morning suit in which he had meant to travel, his arms folded, his head down bent; Steven with almost a woman's shame upon his pale vigil-worn face. Dot in her male attire, all silver and spangles, the rouge that breaking day-dawn now made more distinctly palpable on her cheeks, and with unnatural lustrous excitement in her bistre-shaded eyes! The mirrors giving them back from a dozen different points of view; ormolu cupids drawing shafts at them from various clocks and brackets; the lady with her spaniel, the page, his face half in sunshine, half shadow, simpering down with the superior virtue of a hundred years ago from the walls!

Dora was the first to speak. "You tell me to take back my liberty, and forget you. Such words come glibly, are easy enough to speak to a man. Do you know what they mean to me?"

He made no answer.

"Perdition, Steven; just that. I know very well what will become of me." Under all its spangles and gewgaws the wretched little figure shuddered. "Women, like Lady Sarah Adair, who can live away from their

husbands and keep their position are women with money. I have none. *You* cast me away, and the world, yes, the nearest friends I have, will be on your side and cast me away too. Steven, do you know what the meaning is to a woman of those two words, 'cast away?'"

"You might have commanded my duty to your life's end, if you had chosen," he answered, but without looking at her, "and you did not choose it. I'll do all that lies in my power for you, as far as money goes, but I'll never have you at my side again. The falsehood, the wrong are yours, and you must bear the fruits of both."

"Falsehood!" echoed Dot, drearily, and as she spoke she walked across to the window, stood and watched the cold day struggling with the lamplight in the leafless avenue outside. "Ay, what have I been brought up to, what have I lived and moved and breathed in all these years, but falsehood? Steven," abruptly, "from the day I was fourteen, I have been taught that the greatest virtue for me was falsehood, and so I've come to learn—yes, living in the Dene, in the wholesome atmosphere, you will say, of an English fireside—to look upon respectability as a sham (haven't I been a spectator of Arabella's marriage, of Katharine's engagement?). And now, here in Paris—you won't believe me, I'm condemned, still I choose to speak—here in Paris, amidst frivolity, dissipation, with men and women neither possessing nor pretending to possess high moral character for my companions, I've seen something nearer approaching to *truth* than I ever saw since I left the borders of the Bièvre, sixteen years ago!"

And upon this—for desperation was on her, the desperation most creatures feel when they stand at bay, hard-pressed, irrevocable destruction lying close beneath their feet—Dora Lawrence told her husband all. Told, not without a certain degree of pathos, the story of her early orphaned years; of the hard work, the straightened pleasures of her childhood; of the Mère Mauprat, and the Squire's rescue; of her stunted girlish years at the Dene. "And, in my whole life I've never known what love was, but from Kate," she finished, at last: Steven standing stone-still listening to her. "Uncle Frank took me to his roof, sheltered, clothed, fed me; a piece of duty he owed to his wife's niece, of course, but performed with the constitutional skin-deep kind-heartedness he would have shown to any miserable stray animal that had come across his path. Aunt Arabella, a religious woman, accepted me—as her cross. Later on, you married me! half out of pity, half pique, who shall say? Not a doubt, my conscience is a warped one. Not a doubt, as Shilohite notions go, for a woman in this dress to appear, against her husband's wishes, before two hundred spectators, *is* an unchristian spectacle. To me life, altogether, is such a masquerade that I don't know where righteous falsehood ends, and where immoral truth begins. There, I've said my say. Now, decide for me as you choose." And, by a quick side-movement, she gained the centre of the room, and looked up, with tight-clasped hands, with eager eyes and quivering lips, into her husband's face.

And Steven wavered. She was not a bad actress, poor Dot, in her small fashion! Could give sharp enough random pin-pricks at the confusion of right and wrong in human life, which, to larger minds, is

the mournfulest mystery of our existence, never a mark for pointed little facile cynicisms. But it was not the acting, not the prettily-clasped hands, the quivering lip: not the shallow special pleading which made Steven waver. Sophisms as to the difficulty of sorting right from wrong, truth from falsehood, were not at all, as you know, within his mental compass. And pretty feminine acting—well, he had seen too much of that since he left the backwoods to be carried away by it, with grim daylight resting on the haggard painted face and dishevelled stage dress of the actress! Not these; but the weakness of his suppliant, called out to all of manhood that was in the man; just as weakness, forlorn, defenceless, had called to him on that night in Sacramento, when Klaus first found him, the victim of his own knight-errantry, in the street. Frivolous, erring, falsehood-stained though he held her to be, this poor, small human creature, who looked up at him with piteous bistre-shaded eyes, *had* all the odds of life against her at this moment; and he, strong and standing on the safe side, could rescue her, as she had said, from perdition yet.

This, and this alone, softened him. "I can never trust you, never believe in you again while you live, but Ashcot shall be open to you still——"

"Steven! oh, I swear——"

"Swear nothing," he interrupted her sternly. "Don't come near me!" For, if he would have let her, she had clasped his hands, fallen, a repentant Magdalen (in page attire), at his feet. "I believe no more in your repentance than in your promises—indeed, I've had about enough play-acting of all kinds to last me my life! Ashcot, I say, is open to you. You have

deceived me from first to last, I'll never believe in you again; and so, as I'm not a man to look quietly on at my own disgrace, I'll trust you no further than I can see you for the future."

"And saying this, and under these conditions, you tell me your house is open to me still?" cried Dot, shrinking back before the horrible picture that presented itself to her mind. "Don't say it—don't say it, Steven! Have faith in me, and I may grow to be worthy of you. No human being can do well, mistrusted. Suspect a servant, hired from week to week, and see if he does not soon more than justify your suspicion."

"I had faith in you once, and you deliberately abused it," said Steven, coldly. "A greater wrong committed in hotter blood would not be half as guilty, in my sight, as your premeditated treachery."

"Steven, I declare that you misjudge me. At the last, they over-persuaded me, and——"

"And your dress was made in a day, and the picture from which 'twas taken mended, and Katharine——" for the first time his voice shook slightly,— "Katharine, in her innocence, made the catspaw whereby to get me out of Paris? Dora, I'm not quite the fool you take me for. I've not been thinking alone during the last four or five hours quite for nothing."

She stood still; she wavered for an instant; then caught his hand, clung to it, whether he would or no carried it to her hot, dry lips. "I confess everything! Aglaë and I have been working at the dress by stealth, for the last ten days. I mended the sketch the very day you tore it, and I did (I'm more ashamed of this than of anything) I did work on Katharine to help to

get you away. Steven, I'm a wicked treacherous creature, if you will, but I have saved *you*, you don't know from what! Charlie Wentworth lost I don't know how many hundred pounds at the Barrys last night—everyone was speaking of it at the ball—and the police came down upon them, and the Chevalier is in prison, and Barry and his daughter have saved themselves no one knows where, out of Paris. And Steven, you *shall* listen to me, Lady Portcullis, a woman noted not alone for prudery, but for propriety, appeared at the ball as the Empress Josephine—classical drapery—much more risqué, I assure you, than my poor little page-dress, and Mrs. Stanhope, the mother of a family, went as Guinevere. Oh, it is not I that am worse than other people! It is you that are unlike other men! If you had married any other woman of the world—yes, if you had married Katharine herself, you would not have found her come up to your ideas of what women ought to be."

"If I had married a different woman; if—if—" even at this moment he could not command his voice, "if I had married a woman like Katharine Fane, I would have allowed her no latitude at all. If you had been . . . other than what you are, the first night that I saw you bare-shouldered in a Parisian ball-room would have been the last. You may be sure of that."

"In other words, Steven, if you had loved me! If you had loved me you would have held me, as I needed to be held, with a tighter hand. Love me now? Let this miserable night be the beginning of a new life for both of us. Love me, and keep me out of temptation for the future! I've told you everything—about the Mère Mauprat, even, and the way I

was brought up—everything. Why can't we resolve to put past errors aside? to love, to trust, each other more, and begin our whole life anew?"

Steven turned from her, and paced three or four times up and down the room in silence. Trust, love; the strongest, sacredest feelings of his nature; feelings having their roots so deep within his breast that only death, he felt, could change them; and here was poor Parisian doll proposing, as the people do in operas, to love, to trust anew; to put the past aside (as she would put aside her page costume) because the present happened to be a picturesque situation! The kind of situation at which repentant husband and wife are supposed to fall into each other's arms, and vow, soprano and tenor, a pretty duet of reconciliation and renewed fidelity on the stage.

"We shall never understand each other, Dora; unless a miracle works we shall never love each other; but I'll keep you out of temptation—never fear that. You have been open with me, have told me 'a history which, if you had told it me long ago, might have brought us closer together, perhaps—God knows! At all events, you have been open with me, and I'll be the same with you: Ashcot shall be your home now, and till the hour of your death, if you choose to make it so; and, that this scene may be the last of its kind, I'll put it out of your power to disgrace yourself for the future. I, or Barbara in my absence, will watch you well; and when you do leave home, it will be at my side. I'm not—God knows I'm not—influenced by passion in anything I say, but by duty; and you'll find that I shall keep to it."

She stood (day had broken fully now, and the

faces of both were quite clear) and watched him steadily. "These are your last words, then?" she said at length. "You will not trust me any more?"

"I will have no more play-acting," said Steven. "I 'have been jealous—you would call it jealousy, I suppose—once, and I told you before I was not a man to play at that sort of thing a second time."

"And whenever I leave home it will be with you? and so long as I live at Ashcot you or Barbara will watch me?"

"Yes."

"Ah! Stephen, you are narrow-hearted, you have no sympathy for me, or for my temptations, but you act, I believe this, as you think it right to act. When am I to come home?"

"With Mr. Hilliard and your cousin," answered Steven. "In another hour I shall be on my journey again, and you can return, as it was agreed upon, with them. I don't want to injure you by having all this talked of more than I can help."

"Thank you, dear. You have behaved very well to me. You have given me no blow, have used no hard name, as many a more passionate husband would have done at seeing his wife return home in such a dress; and (although I, no doubt, have forfeited my right to it) have offered me the shelter of your roof still. Your conscience—that's the word, I think—will never upbraid you. And now—now I am weary, and I'll go and lie down. As you are to start so soon, I suppose this is good-bye between us, Steven?"

"I suppose so," was his answer.

"You wouldn't kiss me, I dare say? No, I see you wouldn't. Well, without a kiss, then, good-bye.

I never *meant*, remember, to have done anything wicked!" And having thus spoken, the little travestied figure, with its azure and spangles, its gold-powdered locks, and wistful, painted face, passed away, like a figure in a dream, from Steven Lawrence's sight.

Alone in her room, Dora takes a scented, three-cornered note from the doublet of her page-dress; cries over it; reads it again—again—as if all her hope of salvation, poor wretch, were there! At length, but not until the closing of the outer door tells her that her husband is indeed gone, falls asleep; the note crushed in her hot hand, and a muttered name, that is not Steven's, on her lips. The curtain has risen upon the inevitable last act in earnest.

CHAPTER XVII.

Lord Petres to the Rescue.

BETWEEN four and five on the afternoon of this day, a long, impatient ring came at the door of Lord Petres' apartment on the Boulevard Malesherbes.

Many men—well-meaning, fussy men; human creatures weakly troubled about other things than their own immediate comfort—require time to settle themselves after a journey, or other break upon the common habits of their life. Lord Petres, guided only by the admirably consistent philosophy of selfishness, could subside into his narrow little Sybarite groove in an hour. He had been back one day and a half in Paris (after the conscientious yearly martyrdom among his tenants at Eccleston), and already the clockwork order of his serene existence was going on smooth as ever. Piled-up wood-fires in every room of the apartments,

transformed the gloomy February afternoon into light and cheerfulness. Flowers bloomed against the double windows, the great Persian cat dozed peacefully upon the library hearth-rug; books, papers, the evidence of Lord Petres' morning study, lay on the table. Lord Petres himself outstretched in his easy-chair, was waiting, his eyes closed, for the clocks to strike the half-hour at which it would be incumbent upon him to put on his wraps and take exercise; also, now that Miss Fane chanced to be in Paris, to attend to his courtship.

"Milor," said M. Felix, the valet, coming across the velvet-piled floor, with the slow deliberate noiselessness to which all Lord Petres' attendants had to attune themselves. "Here is a lady who demands milor."

"Give her everything she asks, my good Felix, and let her depart," answered milor, in his plaintive little voice. "After living with me so long, *need* you trouble me about ladies and people who come to the door?" And Lord Petres closed his eyes again.

"But, milor, it appears—I ask milor's pardon, but—"

"Lord Petres," cried the fresh English voice of Katharine Fane, "I wanted exceedingly to speak to you, and as there was not time to wait for you at our hotel, I have come to you here."

Lord Petres rose; M. Felix, with the quick tact of his profession and nation, conveyed himself silently away, and Katharine, coming up to her lover's side, held out her hand to him. "I've come to you in great trouble, Lord Petres. Papa is out of Paris for the day, and I have no one to consult but you. A terrible

misfortune has fallen upon us, and—" And Katharine's voice choked.

It was the first time the lovers had met since the occasion when their wedding-day had been decided upon at Brighton; and Lord Petres held Miss Fane's hand with gentle pressure in his, then carried the tips of her gloved fingers to his lips. "You are looking better, decidedly better than when I saw you last, or else the miserable weakness of my own state makes me exaggerate the health I see written on every other face. Has the wind changed at all, Katharine? You do not know. I admire you for your ignorance. Next to actual beauty (I may say this to you, because you possess both) the greatest charm in a woman is perfect health—if our stupid modern notions of refinement would but allow us to think so."

"Oh!" exclaimed Katharine, "I cannot think of north wind, of sickness or of health, I'm in fearful trouble! What but that could have made me come here to you? You won't think badly of me for doing anything so outrageously indecorous, will you?"

"Whatever Katharine Fane does becomes, by the fact of her doing it, decorous," said Lord Petres, taking both her hands, and looking at her gravely. "Why, we may almost regard ourselves in the light of married people already, with our wedding-day fixed, and, indeed, close at hand. Only one thing break the news, whatever it is, gently to me, Kate. I am expressly forbidden to expose myself to these mental shocks. Your poor sister—the General—all my sympathy will be yours whatever the extent of your bereavement. But break it to me gradually. It will give both of us time to collect ourselves." And

drawing an arm-chair towards the fire he made Katharine seat herself in it; then taking his own place opposite, with folded hands, and his white face solemnner than ever, waited for her to speak.

"I—oh, Lord Petres! miserable and ashamed as I am, I can scarcely keep from laughing, when I think how both of us must look! I have just been to call on Dora Lawrence, and . . . no one is dead at all, you know; there is no catastrophe to shock you . . . and—Oh, I can *never* tell it like this!" Katharine rose to her feet, and turned her face away into shadow. "And she is gone!"

There was dead silence throughout the room after this announcement. The Persian cat roused slightly from his repose, stretched one stealthy paw, claws outspread, in the direction of the intruder, then closed his green eyes tighter than before. The ruddy firelight leaped up and down upon the walls, lighting up, in particular, the breakfast-scene of Hogarth's "Marriage à la Mode," so favourite a series of pictures with Lord Petres that proof-engravings of it hung always round his study-walls in London and in Paris alike.

"Gone!" he repeated, when three minutes—three hours it seemed to Katharine—had passed like this. "Dora Lawrence gone, and no one dead! Kate, I am extremely concerned that you are concerned, but what is the calamity that has fallen upon us?"

"Oh, Lord Petres, can you ask? But no wonder—no wonder! How should you or anyone guess at such a history as I have to tell? Dora has gone: left her husband for ever!"

And now, shading her face so that not a flicker of the firelight could reach it, Katharine's story was told;

told with shame that seemed to scorch her lips as she spoke, but concisely, unflinchingly: the divided life that the Lawrences had led in Paris, Dora's growing love for a world in which Steven had had no part—all. "We have come to a pass now where plainest speaking is best," she finished. "No use to gloss over a disgrace that the world will know to-morrow! Steven Lawrence went to England this morning, and I called not an hour ago upon poor Dot, and found her gone—with Mr. Clarendon Whyte for her companion! Something the French servants told me about Dora having come home at daylight this morning from a masquerade—but of the truth of *that* I know nothing. Here is a note from herself that perhaps I need not read——"

"No, no," said Lord Petres, entreatingly. "I have read a great many of them. Such letters are stereotyped."

"And she tells me that they have started for Brest, that Mr. Whyte has a château in Brittany, 'where, far from the world' . . . nay, but I need not repeat such folly. What I have to think of, to strive for now, is to save her. Lord Petres, it will break his heart!"

"No, no, Kate, I think not," said Lord Petres. "It will make him thoroughly miserable, no doubt, but not to any fatal extent. And besides, what have we to do with Mr. Whyte's heart? He has done it deliberately remember, not even as men marry, from prejudice, or social consideration, but of his own free accord."

"I do not speak of Clarendon Whyte at all," said Katharine, indignantly. "I speak of Steven."

"And Steven loves his wife so well, that the loss of her will break his heart?"

"Not the loss, but the shame—the manner of the loss!" said Katharine, her voice all changed and shaken. "Shame such as we men and women of the world, with our poor conventional ideas of things, could never even guess at. Lord Petres:" she turned, came across to him with sudden energy: "will you help me? I'm going to ask an enormous favour of you: but if you grant it, do as I ask, I will love you, be grateful to you till I die!"

Her lips quivered; the bright blood rose into her cheeks; in her eyes shone a lustre such as little Lord Petres had never seen shine in them before. "You have to command, I to obey, Kate," he answered. "I am not as much agitated, perhaps, as I ought to be by the news; for, really, marriage—it seems an odd thing for persons in our position to be saying—but marriage (a barbaric fossil, imbedded, so to speak, in the strata of advanced civilization) is altogether such an anomaly, that no details connected with it can surprise me. This, however, is less a time for generalization than for the indulgence of immediate and personal feeling. I belong, prospectively at least, to Mr. Lawrence's family, and I am ready to say, feel, or write anything, excepting a challenge—always excepting a challenge—that may be required of me."

"But what I am going to ask is neither that you should say, feel, or write anything!" cried Katharine. "I want you to act—to help me to act—and we have not a moment to lose. Papa is out of Paris; gone to see an old friend at Versailles; and will not be back till late. I have written a few lines, preparing him

to find me gone on his return. The train, as far as I could gather from poor Dora's note, by which they were to leave started at three o'clock; I have looked into Bradshaw, and find that it is a slow train, and that if we start by the express at six we may catch them up at the Le Mans station, supposing, I mean that they wait there to go on by the mail to Brest."

A look of frozen, of unutterable horror crossed Lord Petres' face. "*We* start, the air charged with miasmal exhalations, the thermometer sinking rapidly, by a night-train to Brest! You and I—elope—after other persons who have eloped! And with what object? My dear Kate, high though my opinion is of your good sense, ordinarily, allow me to question it now. With what object must we expose ourselves to night air, and all the other horrors of railway travelling? Why, because A. and B. have chosen to run away, should C. and D.—people with their wedding-day fixed, almost married people already—run away also?"

"I mean, if I can, to save Dot yet," answered Katharine, with quiet determination. "Not for her own sake so much (I shall give over talking half-truths now) as for Steven's. He shall not have to endure this last dishonour if any act of mine can turn it aside. I thought, perhaps, as papa was away, and I must travel at night on such an errand, you would rather go with me than let me go alone. I was mistaken. I have asked too much. Good-bye, Lord Petres."

She gave him her hand: Lord Petres held it, and gazed piteously into her face. "Don't be angry, Katharine, and do listen for one moment reasonably. Of course you'll go; of course I shall go; of course everyone will go

—everywhere that you choose; but listen for one moment reasonably. The thing, I assure you,” Lord Petres grew almost animated, “was inevitable from the first. Don’t you remember my saying to you at Brighton, that the future of Lawrence and his wife must always, on ethnological grounds, be full of interest? It was *impossible* they could stay together. As impossible as that an oil-consuming Esquimaux and a pulse-fed Hindoo could sit down happily to a common table. Steven Lawrence, I gather from your account, has been vitiating his digestion—and what a noble digestion! what an appreciative faculty that man had!—through the course of poison he has been swallowing at cheap restaurant dinners. As the inevitable consequence of overloaded bilious condition of body, his temper becomes irritable: Madame—and, as regards this, no blame is too strong for her!—appears suddenly before him at daybreak in a masquerade attire. The usual scene occurs: the usual third person is ready to come forward later in the day; and the household breaks up. Now, or six months, or six years hence, the catastrophe must have occurred. Even you can’t turn aside the course of natural laws, Kate, and as a friend of Lawrence’s and of hers, as a friend of everybody’s, indeed, I say it is just as well got over now.”

“Good-bye, Lord Petres.”

“Kate, this is the first instance of positive, unleavened, woman’s perversity that I have seen in you. Are they alone? Have these unhappy persons gone to the wilds of Brittany alone?”

“They have not. Dora tells me—poor infatuated little Dora!—that Grizelda Long—shame on her! shame on any woman, I say, who could take part in

such a journey!" cried Katharine, her face a-fire, "is with them at present. To save us, wrote Dot, to spare papa and me (as if *we* mattered!) the disgrace of any immediate Parisian scandal, it had been settled that Grizelda Long should be her companion as far as Brest at least."

"Then I say this simplifies everything," said Lord Petres, brightening. "Mrs. Lawrence has, at the present moment, a companion, a chaperon; and about the future neither you nor I, nor the world, has any right to inquire. The matter, to my mind, is settled. As regards Grizelda Long, your indignation—though it sits well on you, I confess, Kate—is strictly unjust. What would become of us all if there were no Grizelda Longs? social scavengers, human burying beetles, who, simply through instinctive proclivity, are forced to assist at any unsavoury moral sepulture that may be going on? . . . Kate, don't turn away! don't tell me you mean to be obstinate!"

"I mean to start by the six o'clock train for Le Mans," said Katharine; "and it is now almost five. I sent away the fiacre that brought me here. Will you bid some of your people call another?"

Lord Petres, without speaking, rang the bell, which was answered instantly by the velvet-footed Felix. "I start in half an-hour's time for Brittany. Order the carriage, and have fur cloaks, and wrappers heated."

"Yes, Milor."

"You accompany me, Felix."

"Yes, Milor."

"And tell Duclos I am leaving Paris, and that he must furnish me with meat and wine sufficient for two days at least. Now bring tea."

"Yes, Milor."

"You must forgive me, Kate, for being able to think of matters so trivial to you as meat and wine," said Lord Petres, when the valet had left the room; "but as the period at which we may return appears to be thoroughly indefinite, and as partaking of the national food in a country like Brittany might be fatal to me, I feel it my duty to take precautions. Felix is a faithful creature, and, as you see, devoted to my service; Duclos, of course, I could not ask to accompany me into such an exile; and so the only thing I can do is to take a little food with us, put a cheerful face upon it," Lord Petres smiled drearily, "and call it a picnic—in February! Katharine dear, I don't want to be sanguine, but when we are married I hope many more people won't run away, or—or if they do run away, and you insist upon my following them, that it will be at a more suitable season of the year!"

A tiny Indian tea-pot, containing such tea as Lord Petres' household alone knew how to prepare, was shortly afterwards brought in; and Katharine (scarcely able to believe that the whole scene could be true; that Dora's flight was not a fable, and she and her little lover actors, as of old, in some marionette comedy) was left alone to partake of it while M. Felix accoutred his master for the journey. The luxurious bachelor-room, the ruddy fire, those pictures of an unholy loveless marriage upon the walls, the Persian cat watching her, through closed eye-lids, with concentrated smothered enmity, the clocks and time-pieces, a dozen of which at least surrounded the room, each, with its different beat, calling out to her that the time of possible salvation was flying onward, and dishonour, disgrace, be-

coming momentarily more certain . . . when will every detail of those few feverish minutes pass from Katharine Fane's remembrance!"

Lord Petres returned at length; smallest, most unhappy of obedient lovers: hidden up, swathed in wraps, with only a glimpse of a forlorn white face dimly visible beneath a furred cloth travelling-cap. M. Felix, discreetest of valets, stood outside, in *his* wraps and furs, stony-eyed, immovable of feature; in his inmost heart believing, as Duclos, duly informed of passing events in his distant apartment, believes, that the Meess Anglaise, true to the habits of her class and race, is bearing away his poor little Milor, by force, to be married. After this came the drive through the Paris streets; through the brilliant quarter of St. Antin, with its lamplit thousands of fashionable men and women, fellow-toilers all in the toilsomest search that the heart of man can set itself to encompass—the search after pleasure! Madame la Comtesse returning from unduly lengthened drive in the Champs Elysées; Monsieur le Comte starting for bachelor dinner at his club; mothers with fresh-faced daughters, on their way to the theatres; occupants of broughams, occupants of hired fiacres, hurrying crowds upon the pavement; all in fullest pursuit of the same will-o'-the-wisp goddess that none of them, no, not for one hour, in this great Paris which is her temple, shall ever fully grasp. Then across the Seine; the blood-red lamps, on bridge beyond bridge, quivering down reflected, like illuminations in a fairy scene, upon the silent river; on through the quarter of grey St. Germain: lifeless as the aristocracy it sheltered once: to the terminus of the West.

They were in time; with one minute to spare. M.

Felix, pushing his way alertly to the sharp-faced female clerk at the bureau, got the tickets. There were a few seconds, a few seconds only, to wait in the well-warmed velvet-sofa'd salle. Then the folding-doors communicating with the platform were thrown open, and a guard, great-coated, comfortered for his two hundred miles of wintry travelling, called out to the "passengers for Chartres, Le Mans, Rennes, Brest," to take their places. In another minute Katharine and Lord Petres are moving westward, with a carriage—nay, it almost seems, so scarce are travellers on this February night—with a train to themselves, out of Paris!

CHAPTER XVIII.

Gone on to Brest.

THE night had become intensely cold: fine above head, a full white moon shining cloudless: but with a penetrating, raw sensation in the air that made itself speedily felt, even in the artificially-heated well-closed carriage, as soon as the train had left the terminus at Mont Parnasse, and got into swifter motion in the open country toward Bellevue.

Lord Petres crept into the warmest corner he could find, his back to the engine, rolled himself up in his furs, drew a hood over his head and face, and so remained motionless—patient example, if ever one was seen, of an innocent man made to bear the transgressions of the guilty. Katharine Fane took up her place at the furthest, or moonlit, side of the carriage, and leaning up her face close to the window, set herself to watch. The night was piercing cold; but the fever of suspense and excitement that ran through her veins

made her callous to all external sensation. Far away on either side were fairest crystal lights, transparent mystic shadows—a score of varying effects with every new mile they traversed; but Katharine saw none of them. They flitted with a shrill engine-shriek past the shining lake and dusky forest of Versailles; on through once-Royal Rambouillet; across the corn-lands of La Beauce; and still all she saw was Steven's face: all she thought of was Steven's suffering when the truth should be told him—the curtain raised on this last dark act of his miserable marriage. Nature had got her way, you see: was crying out the naked truth in Katharine Fane's heart, at last! Never more could she varnish it over to herself after to-night. She had loved Steven Lawrence, as strongly as it was in her nature to love, months ago, very nearly from the first day she saw him; had loved him till the hour of his marriage; had had a frozen heart within her breast since—warmed into dangerous, fitful life on a certain night, “when fields were dank, and ways were mire,” in Kent. It was *not* for Dora's sake; it was *not* for the saving of the family honour that she had resolved upon such a step as this: a step repugnant to her pride, her delicacy, to every old tradition of decorum in which she had been reared. It was for him: for Steven, whom she had loved and wronged; Steven, whose future lot—clear as yonder outspread wintry landscape she could see it—must be frozen and barren from this day forward unto his life's end.

After this fashion mused Katharine, in lonely bitterness of spirit—the moonlight painting, with delicate opal touch, the outline of her drooping head and throat—through many a mile of the first stage of their jour-

ney. Lord Petres in the meantime, his head encased in its hood, his feet upon the chaufferette, sat philosophically passive; regarding neither the beauty of the moon, nor of Miss Fane's profile; regarding nothing but the comfortable fur-lined wrapper, one inch distant from his own nose. At length the train began to slacken speed; the clocks from a yet unseen town could be heard through the intensely still night; and in another minute Chartres Cathedral, clear, shadowless (a spectral frost-palace it looked, rather than a building wrought by men's hands of solid masonry), rose up, silvery-white out of the purple distance.

"A quarter of an hour's stay!" cried the guard, opening every carriage wide, as if he felt a bitter satisfaction in giving the inmates as much share of the cold and fog as possible. Katharine leaned out her head—a wild thought striking her that the fugitives *might* have stopped here; that Mr. Clarendon Whyte or Dora *might* be among the hurrying muffled passengers on the platform—but the only figure she recognised was that of M. Felix, running swiftly along to secure his basin of hot soup and comforting small glass at the buffet. And now, for the first time, Lord Petres began to stir slightly among his furs; held down his gloved hands over the newly-replenished chaufferette, which had just been placed within the carriage; at length, cautiously lowering his muffler ever so little from his forlorn white face, spoke:

"You don't mean to keep the door open very long, Kate? Thanks. I asked, because there is something I wish to say to you, and I could not speak as long as we were in the outer air. I have been working out a rather important theory as we travelled along;" he rose,

a tottering little pyramid of rugs and wraps, and moved himself nearer to Miss Fane: "and as I have no note-book with me, and my brain, in the present arrested state of my circulation, may be incapable of the effort of memory, should be glad to impart it to you. Would you take the trouble of remembering what I am going to say, Katharine?"

"I—well, I'll do my best," said Katharine, absently; "but my mind is terribly full already, you know."

"Not full of any matter that need exclude what I am going to say—it is, indeed, but a sequel, a correlative to this unfortunate accident about which you are vexing yourself! My theory is this. Every civilized man of marrying dispositions should be enabled, by the laws of his country, to insure at the time of his marriage—as much for the sake of those about him as for his own."

"Lord Petres!—"

"Oh, I have long held this opinion theoretically," said Lord Petres, with thorough earnestness; "and my sufferings to-night have brought the wisdom of it practically home to me. Why, when every other mischance of human life can be amply guarded against, should an adventure as hazardous as marriage alone remain uninsured?"

"Perhaps because when a man marries he does not look forward to misadventure," said Katharine, indignantly. "Insure! Lord Petres, only that I know you are not in earnest, I should be very much hurt at hearing you speak lightly of such a subject, and at such a time."

"But I never spoke less lightly; I was never more

in earnest in my life," said Lord Petres, in his thin little deliberate voice. "The discovery of statistical averages has, you know, Kate, established the practice of insurance in every department of life; and the present unhappy event is a sequence—don't be angry with me!—settled simply by decimal fractions. These calamities fall upon us all personally, of course, but in averages. So many people out of every hundred *must* commit certain actions, and poor Mrs. Lawrence has eloped . . . well, we will say has eloped as 8.7 in a thousand. Domestic catastrophes in the gross are as much matters of fixed law as sound or heat; as uniform in recurrence as the undirected letters dropped annually into the post office. Then, I say, why not insure against them? If there is a definite arithmetic of household, as of every other kind of shipwreck, why should not a man spare himself, and still more his friends, by guarding against such shipwreck beforehand?"

"Possibly because human hearts are not calculating machines," said Katharine. "Possibly because love, and honesty, and trust, are not, like ships and houses, things that you can buy with the money from an insurance office, in place of those that are gone!"

"All this is merely matter of detail," said Lord Petres, with unruffled placidity. "The idea of matrimonial insurance, like every other social innovation, will require time before it can be brought into form, or obtain acceptance from prejudiced minds. You are prejudiced to the last degree (I don't know how I could wish to see you changed) Kate. Like other enthusiastic people, with minds poisoned by transcendentalism, you would hold it nobler for a man to fight, face to face, with fortune than render fortune null and void by

paying a certain yearly sum into an insurance office. And still—”

“And still you will persist in speaking of the nearest, most sacred feelings of a man’s heart, as if they were things that could be appraised by an auctioneer! Ah! Lord Petres, if you *could* establish a kind of moral Lloyd’s! an office that would insure against vain regrets, vain remorse . . . the whole world would flock to it, I suppose!” cried Katharine, with a bitter sigh, and stopped short.

“And this is precisely what my theory, brought into form at some future day, will do,” said Lord Petres. “How can we look forward, Kate? how can we say that in the twentieth century the loss of a man’s wife will not have its precise equivalent—whether moral or financial is matter again of merest detail; but an equivalent that shall be regarded by society as his highest duty to accept, and which shall, at least, save his friends or relatives from the kind of guerilla campaign into which you and I find ourselves forced now?”

“Well, I, thank heaven, shall not live to see all that!” said Katharine, wearily. “There’s a little, a very little, old-fashioned love and old-fashioned honesty left in the world——”

“Vos billets, Messieurs,” interrupts the hoarse-voiced guard, letting in such a rush of frozen air through the door, as sends Lord Petres back, as if by magic, into his place. And upon this Katharine, who has charge of the tickets shows them; the door is slammed to; the signal given; and again the train rushes out into the night, and her solitary watch goes on.

Insure! Guard against loss of honour and of love! She knows Lord Petres too well to take this, or any

other project of his, as more than a suggestion for Utopia: a paragraph for the great work which, in another generation or two, is to form the basis of a new social code for mankind. Still, in spite of its absurdity, there is sufficient flavour of good, prudent worldliness in the scheme, sufficient flavour of the doctrines of expediency held by Mrs. Dering, (and herself!) to give her heavy heart fresh food for retrospect. A matrimonial Lloyd's, a policy that should guard against forfeiture of honour or of love! Had she not once believed, or listened acquiescent to the belief, that a wealthy marriage would be this, and more than this, to her? that disappointment, trouble, the vulgar bankruptcies of other women's lives, would be shielded, as by prescriptive right, from Katharine Viscountess Petres? Viscountess Petres, who should just have paid a stipulated sum beforehand, her own body and soul, as the price of the insurance. She turns, with a kind of shudder, from the bundle of wraps, under which poor little Lord Petres is working out his new little theory, in the corner—Lord Petres, whom she could have loved so well had the word "marriage," never been spoken between them—and with great tears gathering in her eyes, stares out anew across the desolate country. How keenly the stars that trembled soft above her and Steven in the old farm-garden, shine down in this alien France! How hard, how utterly remote is the steel-grey heaven! With what chill significance the telegraph-wires, ready messengers for ever of so many human sorrows and human losses, stretch away—away on either hand as the train rushes on! How everything in this foreign country, this lonely, glittering night, seems to pass before her charged with some mocking likeness to her

own future life! A life frozen, bejewelled, large of scope; far removed from that narrow strip of English ground, that homely span of English duties in which her woman's heart (no suicidal hand stifling all of nature that was in it!) might have found amplest space for contentment.

There is only one other stopping-place between Chartres and Le Mans. They have passed it; are traversing black peat-lands, where not a tree, not a building; where no object, save monotonous rows of turf-stacks, or occasional pool, gleaming, moonlit, out of the morass, can be seen for miles around. At last, just as poor Lord Petres' head is beginning to sink peacefully on his shoulder in sleep, the train once more slackens speed: straggling lights begin to appear, then thicken, on either side the line, and Le Mans, with its confluence of many lines, its reverberating station, and well-lighted buffet, is reached. The guard throws open every door down the train, calling out to the score or so of half-starved passengers within, that half an hour's feeding-time is accorded. M. Felix comes up, shivering after his second-class journey, and bears away his master bodily—cloak, wraps, and all—to the buffet, where Lord Petres totters to the stove, with difficulty removes his fur-lined gloves, then, slowly seating himself, looks up, with a piteous expression of entreaty, into Katharine's face.

"Kate," he remarked feebly, "command my services!—command my services in every way you choose! Are we to bivouac here, or proceed to Brest? I am absolutely in your hands."

"I believe I have brought you on a wild-goose errand, after all," said Katharine, looking hopelessly

at all the bearded foreign faces that surrounded her; "but, if I have, we can only return by the next train to Paris. You keep warm by the fire, and I will go and look in the waiting-room, at least."

And she turned, and saw a man's figure, Parisian-coated, cigar in mouth, languidly walking up and down the platform, immediately outside the buffet-door. It was Clarendon Whyte!

A short, quickly-stifled cry broke from Katharine's lips—"They are here—they are here!" she whispered to Lord Petres. "Stay for me—not a moment is to be lost—stay for me where you are, please, out of the cold, and I will go and find out Dora while there is still time." Then, without waiting even for the attendance of M. Felix, she made her way out through the shivering knot of passengers who were waiting for their hot soup or coffee beside the fire; and, guided by a porter, walked quickly on towards the door of the first-class waiting-room, twenty or thirty steps further down the platform.

On her way she came across the gentleman in the Paris-cut coat, and looked at him hard. He seemed to recognise Miss Fane at once; took his cigar from his mouth, raised his hat, just as he would have done in Hyde Park, then went on composedly with his walk. Dora's poor Brummagen hero was true to the ideal whereby he had fashioned himself to the last. Let so much be recorded of him. To destroy victim after victim by the invincible potency of his charms was simply his vocation; but he was much too deeply imbued with the spirit of the Coldstream cupids and Cruel colonels who were his prototypes to show aught save the impassive calm of blue blood during all preliminary

stages of their destruction. Mrs. Lawrence had elected to run away him; and now Mrs. Lawrence's relations had elected to run after her; and it was really a matter of the most thorough indifference to this dark-souled being personally, whether vice or virtue eventually carried the day. Such, it may be assumed, was the meaning (can commonplace people do more than guess at the motives of heroes so far beyond their sphere of observation?) which Mr. Clarendon Whyte's Hyde Park salutation and languid continuance of his walk along the platform were intended to shadow forth.

Only two persons were in the Le Mans waiting-room at this midnight hour: one a human creature of uncertain age, dressed in youthful unlooped travelling-suit, in a girlish hat—most dissonant with the time-worn face, the time-thinned locks it sheltered—a human creature circling, uneven-paced, in phantom gyrations around; settling ever and anon for a moment, and in execrable French and with ghoulish liveliness reading aloud from the recommendations of patent Tapioca, of Bordeaux blacking, of just-published Parisian sensation novel that lined the walls: the other a small childish-figured woman, veiled, cloaked, sitting, her head resting down wearily between her hands, close beside the stove. Katharine watched them for a minute, unseen herself, through the glass door of the *salle*, then entered softly, walked up to the small woman's side, and laid her hand upon her shoulder:

“Dora!”

And upon this a face—oh, so aged, so altered! oh, so inconceivably hardened by this first stage of the hardening downhill road of shame—looked round. “Kate, Kate!” cried the poor little wretch, starting up,

"*you* here?" And she caught her cousin's hands, clutched them, clung to them, as if to assure herself it was indeed Kate who stood before her at this hour, in this far-away place, not a ghost. "Why, Katharine," her lips parted as if with piteous effort to smile, "what are you doing in Le Mans?"

"Looking after you, dear Dora!" And now that she stood face to face with the delinquent, none of the righteous sternness she had armed herself with, only love, only fullest compassion, was in Katharine's voice. "Did you think I would let you go away from us, and never make an effort to save you? Lord Petres is with me. I made out—the first time I was ever clever in Bradshaw!—that you had gone by a slow train, and would have to wait here for the mail and so I came and you will go back with us!" And before Dora could answer a word she stooped and, just as in the old innocent Clithero days, kissed her. Mrs. Lawrence's lips were beyond all question unworthy of that kiss; yet were Katharine's none the worse now, or for ever after, for having given it.

"You—you *understood* my note?" Dot stammered, her face sinking ashamed on her breast.

"I understood," said Katharine, "that you had lost your senses, that in a moment of folly you were going to exchange life for death, and I am here to carry you back. It is a compact between us—do you remember that night at home, when you were first engaged to Steven, we made a compact, whatever happened—to stand firm by each other to the last?"

"When I was first engaged to Steven at home!" cried Dora; and now she snatched her hand from Katharine, turned from the compassionate pleading

face with a shudder. "Have you come to taunt me with these things? What is home—what is—I don't want to talk of him—what is all the old life to me now?"

"Salvation. Just so much and no more," answered Katharine. "It is to the old life, to salvation, and away from worse than death, that I have come to take you!"

"Too late!" said Dot, with an expression to break your heart in that poor unmusical voice of hers. "Go back, Katharine, and never, for your own sake, tell any one you saw me, held my hands, kissed me, here! I've chosen my part, and I'll play it out—play it out to the last."

While the cousins were speaking, the creature of which I spoke had continued to hover, but with slackened speed, in ever-lessening circles around them. It perched for good now, not a couple of yards from Katharine, and with wide-open eager eyes peered, half-crouching, half-exultant, into her face. Grizelda Long had never loved Katharine Fane, and now, at length, had come the long-coveted moment of reprisal! "We meet in a very painful situation, Miss Fane." Grizelda paused a little, and took out her pocket-handkerchief. "I don't *suppose* you recognized me before?—very painful, very delicate indeed. Travelling towards St. Malo, you see, from whence I go to visit friends in Sark; it chanced—"

"Dora," interrupted Katharine, turning dead away from Grizelda; the solitary occasion in her life when Katharine Fane offered an insult to living man or woman: "the time is passing, and I must speak to you alone."

"Oh, dear!" cried Dot, looking piteously, first at

her cousin, then at her friend; "of course I'll hear you, Kate, though nothing can make any difference now, and—and Grizelda, if you don't mind, Katharine and I would rather talk to each other, please, for the last time, alone."

"Oh, pray don't let me be in your way!" cried Grizelda, with a sniff of indignation. "It is an affair of which I only too gladly wash my hands! Don't for a moment let it be thought *I* wish to participate in any family discussions on the matter!"

So saying, she rushed to the further end of the waiting-room, turned a chair round with its face to the wall, and there seated herself; pretending now and again to wipe tears of Christian pity from her eyes, but in reality—for Grizelda Long's sense of hearing, like all her other faculties, was ubiquitous—not losing very many words of the conversation, low-toned though it was, that followed.

"Poor Grizelda! She has behaved kindly to me, whatever her faults may be," began Dot. "Few women would have consented to do what she is doing for me."

"Very few I should hope," said Katharine, with slow distinctness. "Few women, whatever they were themselves, would help another woman along such a road as you have taken now. Dora, we have only a very few minutes left us, don't let us waste them by speaking of anything but yourself. Oh Dot, Dot! do you know what this is you have done? do you know what life-long misery this is that you have deliberately chosen?"

"It cannot be worse than what I've left," answered Dot. "That is one consolation. The future I have

flown from would have been a death in life. Nothing that is before me now can be blacker."

"In short, the loss of home, of respect, of good name are nothing to you? Is that what you would say?"

"I've seen people pretty happy without them," said Dot, a determined sullen look beginning to grow over her face. "And I know that I was very wretched *with* them, which is more to the point."

"And the thought of your husband—of Steven's ruined life, does not touch you?"

"How can I tell it will be ruined? He never loved me. Why should he break his heart over my loss?"

"And for us—papa, me—have you no pity for us!"

Dot turned her head away impatiently. "I tell you it's too late to change!" she cried. "You meant well, Kate. You have acted generously, like yourself, in trying to save me, but it's too late! I can't turn back. The die is cast. In five minutes you and I will have said good-bye to each other for ever!"

"Dora!" cried Katharine, desperate, "you shall never go! I will hold your hands so fast that you cannot leave me. Oh, I spoke to you wrongly. I put weak motives of expediency, of worldly honour before you, instead of the motive which alone is of worth to guide you, or any of us. Have you no faith in Him who holds the issues of all our lives?" said Katharine, very low and earnestly. "No dread of losing the one great love which is so infinitely better worth than all human affection?"

Dora paused for a minute, and miserable though she was, a mocking half-smile came round the corner of her lips. "If motives of expediency won't save me, neither will theological ones, you may be quite sure,

Katharine! I was born a pagan, and a pagan I suppose I shall die. If the fear of a world I know so well hasn't stopped me, you may be quite sure fear of one of which I know nothing will affect me little. Good-bye, dear, *dear* Kate! I see the people are beginning to get into their places already. It hasn't been altogether my fault, remember!" And she drew herself away from her cousin's side, and looked across the room towards Grizelda Long.

"Dora," said Katharine, her voice sinking to a whisper, "one thing more. This I think I have a right to ask. What fault have you had to find with Steven from the hour of your marriage until this?"

"Fault? actual moral delinquency!" answered Dora. "Well, none I suppose—what can I gain by telling petty falsehoods now? He cared no more for Mademoiselle Barry than for her father. He fought—yes, Kate, I believe in his very heart, he fought against his love for you. He has been quite honest, quite faithful to his duty. You may repeat this, as my opinion, to every one."

"And yet you betray him! You, his wife, leave him to loneliness and dishonour!"

"I leave him," said Dora, "because while our two lives last, they never could flow on peacefully under one roof. I married him (Arabella's work, that!) in a moment of disappointment, and found out my mistake too late. Difference of class, Kate, however pretty radical theories may sound from your lips, is a barrier impossible to get over between man and wife. Steven Lawrence, with all his virtues, poor fellow, is the son of a labouring yeoman-farmer, not a gentleman."

"And so," cried Katharine, quick, as if those words

of Dora's had stung her, "and so you become the companion of Mr. Clarendon Whyte. A curious choice I must allow! Take your own road—I have nothing more to urge. To escape from being the wife of the labouring yeoman-farmer, you run away with the son of the Oxford Street hatter. I have finished. I have not another word to utter."

"The . . . son of *whom?*" said Dora, growing white to her lips. "Katharine do you mean this?—what is this that you are telling me?"

"The only thing I ever heard concerning Clarendon Whyte that was not to his discredit," answered Katharine, icily. "Has the story not reached Paris? It was well known in London a good many months ago."

She turned as if to go; but Dot followed, caught her by the hand. Affection, gratitude, honour, religion had each cried out to her in vain. A chance shaft, aimed without purpose, had found a vulnerable spot in Mrs. Lawrence's soul at last. With this terrible revelation of Mr. Clarendon Whyte's birth the mist had fallen from her sight: the glitter from her hero! Mambrino's helmet, at the unexpected touch of truth, had become the ignoble barber's basin in a second: Dot's ideal was shattered. "Will you swear this to me?" she whispered. "Will you swear to me that this story about him is true?"

"I can swear to you that the story is believed," was Katharine's answer. "Unless it had been pretty well attested, I don't suppose Arabella would have gone so far as to discountenance his intimacy at her house."

A look of blankest despair crossed Dora Lawrence's face. "And for this man, this impostor, my life is to

be sacrificed!" she said. "I see it—oh! I see a hundred things clearly under this new light! If you had told me sooner; if I had known it at the very last minute before I left——"

"You would have repented and turned back?" exclaimed Katharine, drawing the little clammy cold hand within her own. "Dot, is that what you would say?"

"I believe I would turn back now," said Mrs. Lawrence, hanging her head, "if I thought any one would receive me . . . and if everything I possess in the world—all my dresses, and my lace, and my trinkets, Kate, hadn't gone on to Brest!"

"Trinkets—laces!" cried Katharine, with sudden brightness illumining her face. "What matters everything in the world if we get you back?"

"And you think any one will receive me?" whispered Dot, hurriedly. There was need to hurry; time was indeed flying. The Phantom, parcel-laden, had already rushed out of the room; the guard was calling loudly to the passengers within the buffet.

"I know that I will receive you always!" answered Katharine, simply and humbly; "that if the whole world turns from you, you shall be my sister so long as I live." Then, Dot still clinging to her arm, she moved outside the waiting-room door, and stood there—the poor, small culprit trembling all this time like a leaf—while the passengers ran hither and thither upon the platform in search of the different carriages to which they belonged.

"He—he is coming," whispered Dot, as languidly, leisurely, the hero of the adventure came close up to the spot where the cousins were standing. "Katharine,

explain for me! I should never be able to say the right thing with dignity."

But Mr. Clarendon Whyte was equal to the occasion, and gave no one the trouble of explaining anything. "Show me a first-class carriage where one may smoke," he drawled, in his bad French, to the guard; was conducted to such a carriage as he required; entered; exchanged his hat for an embroidered travelling-cap (blue and silver, Dora's fingers fashioned it out of her own favourite colours); then leaned back in his corner, and closed his eyes. This was Mr. Whyte's exit.

As the train glided slowly away Dora stood and watched it, with a face all white and drawn, with heaving breast, with quivering lips.

"Never grieve, my poor little Dot!" said Katharine, tenderly. "Never mourn for the loss which to you is so infinite a gain."

"I'm not—oh! don't suppose I am fretting for Clarendon Whyte!" she cried, her worn eyes flashing. "I'm thinking of myself. The story will be so ridiculous, and there are my things . . . I can't help it, I *must* think of them . . . there are my trinkets, and my Mechlin flounce, your present! not even my own name on the cases, and—and every dress I possess in the world, gone on to Brest!"

CHAPTER XIX.

Dora's Repentance.

"At what hour does the next train start for Paris?" inquires a voice in rasping French; such French as surely can only flow from Grizelda Long's lips.

"Madame, in a short half-hour."

"And for St. Malo?"

"Madame, in five hours and a quarter from the present time."

"Bong." But of a truth it would seem that the intelligence is anything but good to the vexed soul of Grizelda; for she continues to hover awhile round the sleepy-faced porter who gave it; then darts eagerly to the extreme end of the platform; then peers, hopeless-eyed, through the window of the buffet; descries Lord Petres within: hesitates, opens the door, coughs, sniffs, and finally makes a sidelong swoop towards the spot where Katharine's unhappy little lover, waited on by all the people in the buffet (courteous French people, privately informed by M. Felix that Milor pays equally whether he eats of their refreshments or not) is "bivouacking."

Grizelda seated herself on the edge of a chair, grasped her parcels together with her numbed hands, and surveyed Lord Petres fiercely. The eyes and nose of a beautiful woman would not be improved by such a wintry midnight as this; neither were Grizelda's. After a time, Milor taking an occasional sip of the Madeira Duclos had packed up for him, and feebly eating minutest portions of cold chicken—"Good evening, Lord Petres!" she broke forth; nervously, for she was not accustomed to hold converse with lords; hoarsely, for during her gyrations outside the night air had abundantly entered her throat, and given her voice a sound less like the ordinary voice of woman than was even its wont.

Lord Petres turned as much as the collar of his great-coat would allow, and perceiving, not without

surprise, the sex of his interlocutor, handed his wine-glass to Felix, then lifted his travelling-cap an inch and a half from his head.

"We meet on a very delicate occasion," pursued Grizelda, but not as fluently as she could have wished. Something in Lord Petres' salutation seemed to have reduced her to a more absolutely frozen condition than before. "A very delicate, indeed a most painful situation, one may say."

The face of Lord Petres assumed the look of total blankness which, more perhaps than the face of any other man living, it could, when he chose, assume.

"So lately married, and after all her husband's kindness, and such a blow I'm afraid it must be to dear Katharine too. Still, in a certain sense, we have averted much, my lord!"

"Madam," said Lord Petres, with profound courtesy, with awful distinctness, "I am in a very weak state of health, and I have neither the happiness of knowing who you are, nor of what subject you speak. Under these circumstances you will, I feel, pardon my inability for general conversation. Felix!" (in French) "have the kindness to inquire from Miss Fane how many tickets you are to take for Paris. The bureau, it appears, is open."

Felix obeyed on the instant; and Grizelda Long jumped up and followed him out from the buffet. Never, in a life that had been one long humiliation, had Grizelda found herself brought to a pass so humiliating as the present. When Mr. Clarendon Whyte, superb, indifferent, had walked along the platform with the intention of allowing Katharine, and Mrs. Lawrence if she chose, to watch his departure, Grizelda—at her

wit's end, bereft of her luggage, her very travelling ticket in Clarendon Whyte's pocket—Grizelda I say, agitated, forsaken, had intercepted his path, and sought to throw herself upon his compassion: "Most embarrassing circumstances. Katharine Fane had arrived, Mrs. Lawrence it seemed was going to stay, and where—where was she, Grizelda, to go?" The suggestion, however (two short monosyllables), offered in reply by Mr. Whyte, although thoroughly characteristic of the order of knighthood to which he belonged, was of no present, or practical value to Grizelda Long. So, after various desultory flights—once perching herself in the guard's carriage among the mail-bags; once alighting, ticketless, in a compartment full of recruits, from whence she had to be forcibly dislodged by a sergeant—the poor Phantom was at last left stranded: driven to and fro by porters; her parcels strewn around upon the platform; her wide-open eyes looking not very unlike two signal-lamps of distress, as the train passed Brestward from the station. A dishevelled, abandoned Phantom! with scanty supply of money in her pocket, with no one wanting her, with only the tender compassion of buffet waiters and railway officials upon which to throw herself—compassion in nowise to be won either by flattery or fear, the weapons wherewith Grizelda Long habitually fought her way through life. She flew, desperate, from length to length of the building, espied Lord Petres; fell upon him with the result that we have witnessed; and now, one last hope kindling in her breast, was following the steps of M. Felix in the direction of the waiting-room. The changed aspect that affairs at present wore, the thought of Dora's rescue, of Katharine's victory, of Lord Petres' pre-

sence and treatment of herself, had awakened all the spaniel attributes of Grizelda's plastic nature; and she was ready, nay desirous, to fall at the feet of every one of them severally and ask pardon! A little management, a little exercise of her accustomed tact, she thought, and Katharine Fane would surely allow her to go back with them to Paris—second class; with the valet; any way—only go back! And the real share she had borne in the elopement would be hushed up; and the credit of Mrs. Lawrence's salvation transferred, by a little dexterous manipulation of truth, to herself. She waited for a minute; pierced anew by the draught that eddied with such icy persistency down the station; watched M. Felix running quickly back towards the buffet; presently saw the two cousins, Dot hanging closely still to Katharine's arm, come out upon the platform.

Now, if ever, was the moment for an attack, and Grizelda made it undaunted. "I—oh dear! I *am* so thankful!" coming up with a rush, and endeavouring to seize Mrs. Lawrence's hand; "Dora, this is indeed more than I could have hoped!"

Dora hesitated for an instant, then—"I'm sure I don't see what cause you have to be thankful!" she said peevishly. "If it hadn't been for you I would never have started at all. You know it—I don't want to talk to you. It's very cold, and I can't keep standing here."

"Dearest Dora——"

"Oh, I wish you wouldn't! I have had enough scenes of all kinds! If I had been dear to you you wouldn't have helped me on to this." And Dot pressed her hand closer on Katharine's arm.

"And you mean to leave me here, then!" gasped Grizelda. "You refuse me your protection back to Paris?"

"Protection!" cried Dot. "Well, really, can't you protect yourself? The train is long enough to hold everybody, I suppose. I thought you were going to stay with old friends in Sark, or somewhere?"

"Miss Fane," said Grizelda, turning with deprecating submission to Katharine; "I appeal to your well-known generosity, to your sense of honour and of right. Is this the way in which I ought to be treated at the last?"

"My sense of honour and right can matter nothing," Katharine answered frigidly. "Honour and right have had nothing to do with the position you have made for yourself. Dora, dear, let us get on our way. You must not stand longer in this biting air."

They walked on to the buffet, where Lord Petres received Mrs. Lawrence exactly as he would have received her on the most commonplace occasion of life; then stood beside the stove drinking the tea M. Felix had prepared for them, while a ring of attendants, male and female, of the buffet, gazed at them in respectful admiration. Who but English Milors would travel from Paris on a winter's night like this, drink their own tea—paying four times its worth to the proprietors of the buffet—then return, without as much as seeing the Cathedral and the Mairie? Who like English Milors for circulating money, purely and simply for the sake of circulating it?

So think the buffet people. All this time a woman, jaded-faced, with battered hat, with feather out of curl, is once more looking through the window, speculating,

hesitating whether she shall make a last effort, go in and beseech them all in a body to be friends (and Grizelda's heart does so yearn to be friends with a living lord!) or not?

"Katharine," said Lord Petres at last, "are witches abroad to-night, I wonder, or are fatigue and weakness only evolving ocular illusions before me? Who, and what, in God's name! is this apparition that for ever starts up before my sight?—bat-like, ubiquitous, yet endowed with the awful gift of human speech? It has assailed me once already, and now, unless my eyes deceive me, is preparing for instant descent again."

Katharine turned round towards the window which Lord Petres was watching. "The apparition is Grizelda Long," she said. "Grizelda Long, who finds her journey cut suddenly short—"

"—And who is rather embarrassed how to get on to Sark!" added Dot, with a cruel laugh. "Oh, that woman! what punishment would be too bad for her?"

"Embarrassed to get on to Sark?" repeated Lord Petres, in his syllabic matter-of-fact way. "Is there really any matter of embarrassment as regards money, do you suppose, Kate?"

"If there is, it is not our business," said Katharine, with bitter emphasis. "Grizelda Long came here of her own free will; let her get away as she can. Whatever befalls her will be a just retribution!"

But Lord Petres thought otherwise. Men have such different ideas from those of the best, the tenderest women, on occasions like this. Grizelda Long was old, her face not fair to look upon, her tongue loquacious—and, on the score of loquacity, an objectionable human creature to be quenched, as he had quenched her.

But she was a woman, stranded at this hour, alone, forlorn, and, from all accounts, money-less. And Lord Petres' hand, by simplest mechanical movement, went to his pocket.

"I may as well ask her the question, at all events," he remarked, and walked out straight—his small figure was fur-encased again, ready for the journey—upon the platform.

Grizelda made the errand he wished to accomplish quite easy for him. "I must really appeal to you, my lord! Dora and Katharine don't see things as I do, and I dare say they are right, and I'm quite ready to apologize, and explain to them and to you, my lord—"

"Oh, please don't!" cried Lord Petres, as well as he could speak through his mufflers. "You will excuse me, I'm sure, on the plea of my wretched health, for keeping my head covered? There has been a misconception, it appears—please *don't* explain! I am without an opinion in the matter—and everybody is going a different road to what they intended. You, as likely as not, have got separated from your luggage. So, pardon me for asking you, may I be your banker?"

"My lord——" uttered Grizelda.

"I find," taking out his pocket-book, "I have very little money with me, half a dozen or so Napoleons, and, fortunately, a ten-pound Bank of England note. Will this be of any use?"

The gold-pieces glistened pleasantly in the lamplight; the sound of the English note was crisp, deliciously crisp, in Grizelda's ears. "Of—of course I'll pay you back," she stammered, taking out a well-worn, very empty purse.

Lord Petres put the money into her hand; then,

with courtesy as thorough^d as he could have shown to a duchess, bowed himself away from her thanks. The whistle had sounded, the lights of the approaching engine were already visible in the distance, and in three or four minutes' time Dot, looking back from the departing train, saw the last of Grizelda, as she still stood (regretting possibly, now that it was too late, that she had decided for Sark, not Paris) outside the buffet.

"And so ends that part of the play, then!" Mrs. Lawrence thought, sinking back into the corner of the carriage. "Upon the whole earth *can* there be another woman so hopelessly miserable as I am? Don't talk to me, Katharine!" she bent forward and whispered, "I'm not ungrateful to any one, but I can't talk. I'm worn out, I think. If I can, I'll sleep."

Then, resting her face down on the arm of the carriage (deadly pallid the small face looked in the mixture of lamplight and moonlight), Mrs. Lawrence closed her eyes, and began to commune with her own soul. Excitement was over now: hopes, fears, as to the wearing of the blue and silver; the intoxication of the masquerade; the scene with Steven; the conflict in which she had been ignobly conquered; her flight; her rescue;—all over. The dead quiet of repentance had set in: repentance not as a theatrical pose, a picturesque half-hour's attitude, but a blank uphill road, to be trodden through all future time at Ashcot—if, indeed, Steven would take her back to be his wife there. Oh, bright Parisian hours! oh, murmured flatteries! oh, throng of worshippers, with opera-glasses all uplifted to one mignonne bébé face—had she indeed quitted them for ever? Was that masquerade the last, the very

last delight she was to know in this nether world? If they had let her sink, irrevocably, into the lost life whose portals she had so nearly crossed, had her prospects for the future been as utterly dark as these? The return to right, to virtue, had seemed tolerably easy in that first moment of indignation against her low-born betrayer—that first moment of re-action, in which love, that was not love, had veered so quickly round to hate; easy, with Katharine's voice pleading, with the theatrical colouring of the whole situation to lead her on. It seemed appalling, more than she could live through, now that she began soberly to think out—here, on her way to Ashcot—the details of what right and virtue, for her, would mean! For it was but a morsel of a conscience, mind, wherein Dora's "repentance" went on! A conscience from which, by very paucity of space, larger temptation, or larger remorse, was excluded! A conscience where, even in a moment like this, the forfeiture of ball-dresses and gold powder, of well-dressed partners and scented pink notes, was, in reality, the dread that reigned supreme!

After a time she slept, and continued asleep or dozing for two or three hours. When at length she woke,—came back, with a shiver, to remembrance of the present, from some dream of bygone butterfly enjoyment,—day had already broken. They were once more passing through Versailles. Dora looked round the carriage, and saw with relief that the eyes of both of her companions were closed; that no one was watching her in this first moment of awakening to her changed life! Instinctively rather than because she could really care how she looked, she took out a small travelling-glass from her pocket, and began to arrange

her hair, and dress; then, seeing how white, how old, how ghastly a face looked back at her, shut it up with a sort of groan, and commenced gazing out disconsolately at the country as they passed along.

Early February though it was, on no morning of August could the world have looked brighter than it did to-day. Serenely golden the full moon shone yet, a star beside her, in the south, while all along the Eastern horizon the cold pure flush of day was momentarily deepening. Every skeleton oak-leaf, every delicate fir-needle in the plantations bordering the line, was crusted thick with hoar frost. Hoar frost lay in fantastic pathways along the exposed ridges of the orchards. The smoke, already rising from cottage and farmhouse hearths, floated in ash-coloured rings upon the quiet air. It was a morning, in spite of latent damp and a thermometer at 30°, to cheer the heart with its freshness, the promises it seemed to yield of coming spring! But nature, as you know, was never more for Dora than a background, a setting to her own immediate joys and miseries. This flushing sky, these rime-enamelled leaves, this blending of night and day, of winter and spring-time, to her spoke one word—country! That summing-up of human desolation, that Siberia, away from Paris, from London even, in which the remainder of her days was to be sacrificed.

She was still gazing, hopeless-faced, through the window when the train stopped just outside the Mont Parnasse station for the collection of tickets. "Courage, Dora, courage!" whispered Katharine, kindly. "Don't look so down-hearted—remember all you are returning to in England."

"That's the very thing I *am* remembering," was

Dot's answer. "Do you think I should feel as I do if I was going to stay in Paris?"

On quitting the terminus Lord Petres, by this time more dead than alive, went off, at Katharine's desire, direct to his own house, and the cousins started alone in a fiacre to the Hôtel de Rivoli. It was seven o'clock now, and in this old-fashioned quarter of the town the whole population of the town seemed already astir. Priests hurrying to early mass, ruddy milkwomen from the country, bakers standing pale-faced at the doors of their shops, workmen in blouses issuing from the cheap cafés where they had been breakfasting on their road to work—Dot looked out with listless curiosity at them all. "I haven't seen the streets at this unearthly hour since I was a child," she said. "Who would believe we were in Paris? How chill, how hideous, how exactly alike life must be, here or at Ashcot, to people whose only pleasure is to perform their duties faithfully!"

As she spoke the fiacre made an abrupt turn from the regions of narrow overhanging streets into one of the broad quays that border the Seine, and modern Paris—fairer, surely, at this hour than any city in Europe—lay before them. Paris without a shadow! a picture painted all in vivid chromes, in subtlest pinks and violets, column and dome and palace-roof rising white against the sky; the lamps still quivering reflected on the cold green river; the pearly, vapourish crimson of the February sunrise floating over all. "And to think I've lived my last here!" said Dora, turning away from the window. "Paris—dear, dear Paris! Whatever my guilt has been, my punishment will be an adequate one, for I shall lose *you*!"

CHAPTER XX.

Her Confession.

ON arriving at the Hôtel de Rivoli the first face they saw was Mr. Hilliard's. Katharine's few hurried lines had been at once so contradictory and so blotted that the poor little Squire, up to the present moment, had come to no definite conclusion as to who had run away with whom! All he knew was that there *had* been an elopement; and on the strength of this knowledge he had thought it his duty to sit up all night (for Mr. Hilliard was a man guided strictly by precedents, and when his sister Olivia ran away with the curate, thirty years ago, he remembered how no one at home took their clothes off for two nights.) "My Kate, my poor children!" he cried, running out, bare-headed, across the pavement to meet them, and looking back into the empty fiacre for possible delinquents. "What, alone?"

"Alone, papa, and too cold and tired to speak," said Katharine, hurrying Dot past the open-eyed waiters. "You will not see Dora again till this evening—for we mean to start, please, just as we intended; but as soon as I have made her warm and given her some breakfast, I will come down and tell you everything."

And then—for she was no lukewarm Samaritan—Katharine took the poor forlorn runaway whom she had rescued to her own room; with her own hands kindled a blazing wood fire; ordered breakfast—taking it in herself at the door that not even a servant's eyes should give Dora pain—waited on her; chafed her

cold hands; took off her wraps, tried to show by every delicate sign her heart could prompt, that they were sisters, not a remembrance of Dora's misdeeds between them! Natural affection, the inalienable bond of a youth spent in common, disposed her doubtless to this charity; but beyond, deeper, tenfold, than all other feeling was the hope that, by extending forgiveness to Dora, she might ward off disgrace from Steven. That the world—poor Katharine!—might mete out shame to him in inverse proportion to the forgiveness, the tenderness she lavished upon his wife. "You have been saved, have saved yourself, Dot," she said, as Dora, rigid and tearless, was sitting, her untasted breakfast at her side, before the fire. "Don't look so miserable. If we are to be judged by our intentions alone, which among us will be saved?"

"Saved!" repeated Dot, with something of her old mocking spirit, "and for what, I wonder,—this world or the next? No breakfast, thank you; I never eat till eleven; they may bring me my chocolat and a brioche then. Kate!" opening her tired eyes wide,—"I wonder if there *is* another world after this or not?"

"Oh, Dot!" cried Katharine, "don't wonder on such a subject—believe."

"Wonder—believe!" repeated Dot; "and what is that but a different way of saying the same thing? What are words but so many vowels and consonants, to which every one puts the meaning that suits him best? Now disgrace (I'm disgraced, of course; I don't want to argue the point for a moment), but what an arbitrary term it is! How dependent upon position, money, the accident of being a man or a woman—

upon anything, indeed, except the action that has incurred it! Sitting here and looking in the fire, I see my whole future life spread before me; miserable if Steven does not take me back; more miserable still if he does. And in my heart I don't feel more wicked than I did the day before yesterday! I don't see that I am worse than any of the women I know whom better fortune has kept from being disgraced. Some one must be a loser in every game, I suppose, and you can't tell which side of the table is the wrong one till you have tried it. Well, you or another! Where's the good of complaining? You've had the excitement of the play, and must put up with being beggared!" and Dot laughed, the saddest laugh, thought Katharine, that it had ever yet been her lot to listen to.

After a few minutes she went on again. "It began long ago—we may as well talk about it as sit silent—yes, as long ago as Ashcot, but until yesterday morning I would as soon have thought of cutting my right hand off as of leaving Steven; I swear that. Before I married him you know I liked Clarendon Whyte. I don't suppose I was in love with him. I don't suppose I could be in love with any one. But Clarendon Whyte suited me. Until Arabella turned his foolish head he liked me. Well, then Steven Lawrence appeared on the scene; Steven Lawrence in love with Katharine Fane's picture, and come all the way from Mexico to marry *me*. We needn't dwell on that time, perhaps?"

"No," said Katharine, her face sinking down between her hands. "No need to dwell on anything that is past now."

"I didn't deliberately accept him knowing I could

never like him as I could like Clarendon Whyte," went on Dot, "or I might feel guiltier than I do. I accepted Steven, I married him, believing the past to be over, and Clarendon Whyte engaged. That, again, was Arabella's work. May she be rewarded for it! Well . . . let me try to tell the story in order . . . You remember the first time you ever visited me at Ashcot? You told me Mr. Whyte was at Brighton, as intimate as ever with the Derings, not married, not thinking of being married; the story had been a 'mistake' of Arabella's. Think if my heart was bitter that night against her, against Steven, against the whole world! Next day I wrote him a note, a line or two—any one might have seen it—directed to his club in London, congratulating him on his engagement, and saying that we should hope some day to see him and his wife in Kent. For a fortnight no answer came; the fortnight you and Steven used to ride and be so much together—Steven's only happy time I know since his marriage."

"Oh, Dora, what good can be done by saying all this now?"

"There is no good to be done by anything, I know," answered Dot; "but before execution the worst criminals of our religion are allowed to confess themselves, and as you are the most merciful confessor I shall ever get, I choose to make my short shrift to you now. For a fortnight no answer came from him—I suppose that was about the time when the latter story became known—then he wrote me a letter, heart-broken! from Paris. He had never had a thought of marrying; he had never ceased to think of me; had considered, although no definite promise had ever

passed between us, that we were engaged; had been driven to despair by hearing of my marriage, et cetera. . . Well," went on Dot, with a slight quiver of the lip, "I *was* moved, I *was* made miserable by that letter (it was a day Steven was very late, I remember; Uncle Frank's horse went lame, or something, and he had to take you home), and I read it over and over again through that wretched afternoon, and felt how unjust everything was, and—and forgave him for writing to me in the same sort of way he used to write to me before I was married.

"That night I made Steven promise to go to Paris; don't look so surprised; not on the strength of Clarendon Whyte's letter, though I did almost read it aloud to him by mistake, but on one I had had on that day from Grizelda Long. Ever since I came home a kind of fever possessed me to go once more to Paris, before the damp and horrors of Ashcot killed me outright, and I had written to her about lodgings. Next day I walked over to the Dene. Do you recollect, it was Sunday? Aunt Arabella, very cross over Sunday books, told me to look above, not out of my own house, for support; and Uncle Frank would not hear of Paris; and you—poor generous Kate!—came to the rescue and lent me a hundred pounds of your own money to help me,—and the thing was settled.

"We came, and I and Clarendon Whyte met. Katharine, you needn't turn your face aside. You needn't be afraid any story of high-flown guilty love is coming. I'm not so wicked as you think. Love has had nothing at all to do in the matter. I met Clarendon Whyte, and I liked to be seen with him . . . Even now I can't help thinking he was the best-

looking and best-dressed man in Paris! This dreadful Oxford Street story was not known,—and I could see Lady Sarah Adair liked him! There—the secret is told! Lady Sarah liked him, and flattered though he was by her preference, I said to myself she should *never* take him from me! And I kept my word.”

“And for this!” exclaimed Katharine, “for a feeling of vanity like this you were prepared to sacrifice your life.”

“Kate,” said Dot, quietly, “we women, it seems to me, sacrifice our lives every day; for vanity, for money, for distinction; for anything, everything but love! Out of all the ruined lives that are being lived out in the world, I should like to know what proportion were brought to ruin by love. One in a thousand, should you think? I was resolved not to be conquered by Lady Sarah; I liked to be talked about. ‘Clarendon Whyte is the Bébé’s shadow.’ It amused me to know that the people who saw us together said this: ‘And she cares as much for him as for the worn gloves, the faded bouquet she flings away when the ball is over.’ Love? Why, Kate, have I had time to think of love? Should I have been contented with my toilettes and my drives, and my partners, if I had had anything very guilty on my conscience?”

“I’m sure I can’t say,” answered Katharine, as Dot thus indignantly repudiated the one feeling which might have pleaded, not an excuse, not a palliation, but a human intelligible reason at least for her betrayal of Steven. “I should have thought, perhaps, something stronger than the wish to be spoken of, or even of outrivalling Lady Sarah Adair, might have been wanted to make you forsake your husband’s side.”

"And so it was, something very much stronger than either," answered Dora. "I'm merely giving you the reason why, up to a certain point, I received Clarendon Whyte's attentions. Until yesterday morning, as I told you, I would have cut off my right hand sooner than have left Steven. The reason that drove me from him was fear! Yes, Kate, simple, cowardly, personal fear. I was standing on the brink of danger, if you choose, already. Standing where any accidental push might send me down. The hand that gave that push was Steven's—I swear it, the same as I would swear, dying. You've heard—I told you down at Le Mans—how I went to that masquerade (ah, Kate! what hurts my conscience most is to think I deceived you, made you, innocently, play a part in it all). Well, I told a hundred falsehoods, at least, to get there unknown to Steven. I acknowledge everything. I say the dress I wore was one of which he had expressed his horror, that it was an unfit, an unwomanly one! I say all this—but I say one thing more. When I came home, as I walked up the steps of our lodgings—for the last time, by-the-by—I had no guiltier thought than of the delightful evening I had spent, and of how admired I had been by artists, Katharine! of course everything's over, now; but mine *was* the success of the evening—sky-blue and silver, and a dear little velvet toquet, with a white feather, and in the middle of the evening M. Valentin asked to make a sketch of me, and the Prince N——invited me for three dances very likely, was it not, that I should be thinking of running away with Mr. Clarendon Whyte at such a time as that! I came home, I say, thinking of the ball—singing, poor fool that I

was, and I pushed open the door—and, as you know, saw Steven.

“I deserved reproaches, suspicions; no doubt of that. I deserved to be told that of my own free will I had forfeited my right to return to Ashcot—the roof, thank God! that had only sheltered honest wives hitherto.’ I deserved, I got all this, and more. Katharine, what will you have? When he stood before me, not in a passion so much as in a rage of disappointment—of disgust too deep for passion—I admired him! If I had been a man, I thought, I had felt, had acted the same. It pierced my heart when he told me I might choose what life and associates I liked, so long as life and associates were apart from him, for the future. It hurt me like a blow when he spoke of the trust he had had in me, the reverence—he used that word—the *reverence* that, in spite of all my follies, he had held me in till now. I took his hand; I clung to him; I even told him the history of my life before Uncle Frank found me. I besought him to have mercy upon me, and to let me begin my life anew.”

“And he turned you away from him?” cried Katharine, with kindling eyes. “Steven Lawrence turned you away from him when you made this last appeal to his pity?”

“No,” answered Dot: slow and measured her voice grew at this part of her confession. “He did what was worse than turning me away from him. If he had only done that, in the passion of the moment, I might have gone straight to you and Uncle Frank next morning, and have been saved. He told me that Ashcot should be open to me still! I should live there—if you had seen the expression of his face as he said

this! suspected, watched, if not by him by his servant; should have no further possibility, mark that, no possibility, of misconducting myself to my life's end. . . The remainder of my days I should spend, on sufferance, in my own house for a prison, my husband, or in his absence, his servant, for my jailer. This was his last determination; and upon this I left him. Shall I tell you with what feeling, Kate? the same feeling of trembling, sickening fear I used to have of the Mère Mauprat, when she would threaten to shut me up on bread and water for having got away to the theatre or dancing-gardens without her leave. I've no courage. I've a heart as small as my body. The thought of Barbara watching me, of Steven with that look upon his face that I had seen awhile since, frightened me as if I had been a child of twelve yet. Where was the good of repentance, if this was all that was to reward me, I thought? And then I took a note Clarendon Whyte had given me as I left him: a note I would have held over the candle, have valued at its true worth at any other time, and read it, and cried over it, till I fell asleep. When I got up, towards mid-day, Steven had been long gone. I began my packing (weary and heart-sick though I was, I really meant to return with you and Uncle Frank still), but my hand shook so I couldn't get on with it. Then I told Aglaë to put up my dresses for me, and I went into the salon, and by-and-by, Clarendon Whyte came in.

"I was heart-sick, disgusted with everything, alone—what evil chance made you visit me so late that day?—and when he told me he would care for me always, I couldn't help listening to him. He was exquisitely dressed, I never saw him look so handsome,

and he had brought me some violets—here, I have them, dead, in my belt!—and he made me confess all about my quarrel with Steven, and prayed and besought me to give up such a ‘savage of a husband,’ and go away with him. I could do nothing but cry for a long time, for he *would* talk about this château in Brittany, that Lord Some-one had lent him, and it seemed to me it would be only flying from one æsolation to another to go there. But at last, when he said he would take me to Italy, where I should have a chance of getting strong, and where people are visited, no matter what they have done at home, I began to hesitate. ‘If we had only money,’ he said, ‘years of happiness in the South might be before us.’ And then I told him I had control over a thousand pounds of my own, and he got more in earnest than ever, and repeated—you know how he can repeat poetry?—that piece of Shelley’s ‘Epigram,’ ‘Epitaph,’—never mind what—the piece with a long name, and all about an island in the Ægean, and books and music and solitude, and I told him, at last, if it was not for the sake of disgracing you, I thought I would go. I felt very wretched. The prospect of being alone with him, at a château in Brittany, or on this island with the music and books, were both equally dreary, and of course I felt, too, that I should have lost my good name and all that for ever. Still, even this seemed better than to return to Ashcot and Barbara, and then, just when I was wavering, when a word would have decided me either way, came a ring at the bell, and I heard Grizelda Long’s voice talking with Aglaë outside. I jumped up; I wanted to escape to my own room, for my eyes were red, and I didn’t

choose any one belonging to the old life to see me any more: but Mr. Whyte would not let me go. 'My friend, Miss Long, was the very best person I could consult just now. He happened to know that Miss Long was herself on the point of leaving Paris. How, if she could be prevailed on to accompany me in the first stages of my journey, and thus soften off the shock that I seemed to be so much in dread of for my relations.'

"Well, Grizelda Long came in, and at the end of half an hour everything was arranged. I dare say, now I come to think of it, the plan was made up between them beforehand. Grizelda during the last two or three days had, I know, parted company abruptly with her employer, so as likely as not Mr. Whyte made it worth her while to undertake the part she played. What does this matter to me? I never want to speak either of their names from this hour till I die. They settled it all—the train we were to go by, the letter I should write, all—and then Clarendon Whyte went away; Grizelda Long began to help Aglaë to pack my things; and two hours later the note to you was written, and we had started.

"I don't know how other people feel when they find themselves upon the road to ruin," went on Dot, after a minute's pause. "From what I have read in novels and poetry, I should have judged that the first few hours at least of the down-hill journey would be pleasant ones. I speak for myself, and say they were the most thoroughly miserable hours that even I have known in my life. I looked every now and then at Clarendon Whyte as he sat opposite me (Grizelda Long went to the other end of the carriage, and osten-

tatiously turned her face towards the window), and I know that I did not love him; that in four-and-twenty hours with no one else to look at, no one else to speak to, I should be as weary of hearing him repeat poetry as I had ever been of the tick-tack of the old kitchen-clock at Ashcot! I knew that I should get weary of any one alone, and away from distractions and amusements. I can't say I felt remorse—like what you read of in books. I was horribly sorry for myself. I hated the thought of Brittany as if I had lived there for years. If it had been possible—I mean if I could have been sure the story would never be known, and if all my dresses and my trinkets had not been registered on to Brest—I would have got out, yes, at the Versailles station, and gone back to Paris. I felt a kind of rage as I looked at Clarendon Whyte, leaning back indifferent in his dainty velvet coat and lavender gloves, and thought how lightly the misery and shame would fall on *him*; and—yes, Kate, I thought this already!—how certain he would be when my thousand pounds were spent, and his last conquest sufficiently talked of, to leave me to whatever life I chose to make for myself. I thought of you, married to Lord Petres; I thought of Arabella; of every woman I knew; and felt how unutterably more miserable I was fated to be than them all. Clarendon Whyte leant forward at last and whispered—there were other people in the carriage—something about the South and the Mediterranean being the land for passionate lovers! 'I shall die long before you go there,' I answered; for indeed I felt ill when I started, and the cold and damp of that horrid evening had made me worse; 'or, at all events, I hope so!' And after that he did not make

any more attempts at consolation till we got to Le Mans.

"Katharine, you know the rest. Grizelda Long, who arranged the journey, saying that she understood Bradshaw better than any human being living, had brought us by a wrong train. We must wait some hours at Le Mans before the mail-train for Brest would take us up. Our luggage, as we had had it booked on, was all right; so were we. Our tickets were perfectly en règle, only we had got to wait. I think I was glad of the delay. It amused me to hear how Clarendon Whyte swore. He had, at least, a temper, I thought. There would be something beyond looking at swamps in Brittany and reading poetry to make the time pass! And then in my heart I had a thought—not a hope exactly—a thought that something *might* happen yet, some one arrive by that late train from Paris and save me!"

"And that something happened," cried Katharine. "Lord Petres and I arrived; and brought you back from misery to happiness!"

But Dot's eyes filled; she turned her face wearily away from Katharine. "You came, Kate, you brought me back, but as to happiness . . . Only a miracle could give me that, and we've no miracles on the earth now. Happiness to me means Paris and knowing people I like, and wearing becoming clothes, and being asked to dinners and balls. The very desires of the flesh (as Mr. Lyte would tell them at Shiloh) that have already been my ruin!"

So ended Dora's confession; not an edifying one! A confession presenting the frivolous or butterfly aspect of our many-sided life in as pitiable a light as the

sternest moralist could desire; yet still, as far as the manner of recital went, possessing the merit of truth. Truth barer, more absolute, perhaps, than a woman of higher nature could have brought herself to utter. For in higher natures, whatever their guilt, some spark of the self-respect which begets silence must remain vital to the last.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Return Home.

THE next day was Sunday—a pleasant sunshiny Sunday at home in Kent, and by an early hour Dora's two jailors were setting her prison-house in order; not, as jailor nature goes, unkindly; against her return.

During the lonely hours of his journey from Paris, in the first contentment of finding himself back upon his farm, a good deal of Steven's anger against his wife had softened. Belief in her was shattered; but what, if he looked into the matter narrowly, and his belief in her been for many a week past? Was the act of wearing the blue and silver very much worse than the desire to wear it? Was the dress itself—as Dora, unconscious of irony, had asked—worse than every ball-dress she had worn during the last two months? Finally, was she not a creature to be judged by the rules of a world beyond his comprehension; a creature with less than a child's responsibility (Katharine's cousin, too!), and here in Ashcot would not her small feet, by very want of the possibility of temptation, be forced for the future to walk straight? Such were Steven's reflections. As he made them he repented him of his harshness; nay, felt himself cowardly

for having been betrayed into it, as a man feels who in a moment of haste has struck a child. And on Saturday, during the very hours when his wife, sullen and hopeless, was sitting by the fire at the Hôtel de Rivoli had ridden over to Canterbury and hired a piano, a work-table, and half-a-dozen other knickknacks, that Dora on former occasions had declared to be necessary to her existence at Ashcot.

"You'll need to build a new house over your head soon, Steven!" said Barbara, as she looked round the altered parlour next morning; the Sunday morning when Dora was expected back. "What with all this new foolishness downstairs, and a dozen or so o' them Frenchified clothes-boxes *up*, the kitchen 'll soon be the only room in the house large enough for full-grown folk to turn round in."

Steven answered, good-humouredly, that Paris had given him ample experience of rooms in which "full-grown folk" could neither turn round nor stand upright, and yet live. Then, Barbara betaking herself to the kitchen to see after the extra good breakfast which by the master's orders she was preparing, he went out into the sunny front garden, lit his pipe, and began to saunter up and down the path that led towards the road. The path along which, in imagination, he had seen himself returning from work (on that evening when he listened to Klaus's story in Mexico); the path from which, in imagination, he had seen a girlish figure, a fond soft face waiting to meet him in the porch.

He finished his pipe; lit another; finished that; heard the distant parish bell going for morning service; and still no sign of the Squire's carriage was to be

seen. It was close upon eleven o'clock; long past the time at which it had been arranged Mr. Hilliard and Katharine should leave Dora on their way back from the station. Either they had not returned then, or Dora was remaining for the day at the Dene; and with rather a chiller feeling than you would have said the occasion warranted, Steven went back to the house to eat his breakfast alone.

Barbara met him at the door. "The Squire is in the parlour, Steven. He must have come through the fields, for he rode up along the back way; and I doubt something's wrong," added Barbara, in a whisper, "for the Squire's got a face like the grave, and would have left his horse standing—only I beckoned across the close to old James—and neither man nor boy to hold by the bridle."

"The Squire—what alone?" cried Steven; then without waiting for an answer, he threw down his hat and walked into the little parlour—cheerful with a blazing fire; the breakfast equipage for two upon the table; a few early snow-drops and violets (Barbara's attention) set in a glass by the mistress's plate; the morning sun slanting on the window pane; the ticking of the old house-clock sounding like a homely voice of welcome for the traveller who was expected.

"Good morning, sir! I suppose, as I see you alone, that Dora means to remain with her cousin for the day?"

Mr. Hilliard, who was standing looking into the fire, turned round with a face, as Barbara had said, like the grave, and passed his hand quickly across his lips. "Dora means to remain? Yes, yes, of course," he cried, speaking very fast. "How are you, Law-

rence, how are you?" And he seized Steven's hand, and wrung it as if they had not met for years. "We crossed last night as we planned—very fine passage—wind in the north-east; and—and Katharine thought I'd best come round first, just to break it a bit, you understand. And I wish to God some other man had to do it!" exclaimed the Squire, still violently shaking Steven's hand, and with a purple flush of agitation gathering deeper and deeper upon his own kindly face.

"Break? break what, sir?" said Steven, moving a step away as soon as the Squire would release him. "Has Dora not returned with you, after all?"

"Returned? ay, she has returned, but you see—it's no good!" broke out Mr. Hilliard vehemently, "I must tell it you in my own way—as one man should tell another such a thing—or not at all. She started off—left us all in Paris on Friday—and Katharine and Lord Petres started too, and caught them, and brought Dora back. There's the truth—I've told it you faithfully; and, now, you can do as you choose about the rest!"

A speech that would take a page and a half, at least, to write had been dictated to Mr. Hilliard by Katharine: a speech in which the story of Dora's flight had been couched in softest terms; in which Steven's heart had been prepared by all manner of illogical feminine logic for forgiveness; in which a beautiful picture of domestic reunion and happiness had been reserved for the last; the whole of which Mr. Hilliard had dutifully repeated, or tried to repeat to himself as he rode along on this the shamefullest errand that in his life he had been called upon to perform. But at the sight of the homely parlour, at the sight of Steven's

honest face—"Kate," he confessed afterwards, "I felt that every word of our fine oratory, even if I could have remembered it, would have been an insult, and so I told him the truth right out. If you had to break to a man that one of your relations had embezzled his money, would you work up the story of his loss into a sermon? impress upon his mind beforehand the blessing that poverty, rightly used, might prove to him?"

The Squire told his errand right out, and Steven stood and listened, his face growing whiter and whiter, his demeanour passionless as it had been on the night when he found M. Valentin's sketch upon his wife's dressing-table. "Was Clarendon Whyte the man she left me for?" he asked, after a minute, just a quiver on his lip, just a slight change—an ominous one it would have sounded to any one who knew him well—in his voice.

"Yes, yes," answered the Squire, considerably relieved now that the first dreaded words had been spoken, and more relieved still at seeing Steven taking things so quietly. "He was the man. I used to tell Kate I didn't like his looks when he was so much with them in Paris; indeed, if I had had my way I should have spoken to you then, but it seems . . . Well," broke off Mr. Hilliard, reverting with a start from what he thought to what he had been told to think; "it really seems the thing was unpremeditated. Dora went to a ball that night you missed the train. You were harsher with her, perhaps, than you ought to have been on her return, and—without caring for this blackguard—she threw herself upon his protection sooner than face your anger!"

Steven laughed—a laugh the Squire will find it

hard to forget while he lives. "And who persuaded her to give up the protection of this blackguard she did not care for? Lord Petres? Miss Fane? I should like to have the details of the story correct."

"Lord Petres and Katharine went after them—Dot had left a note, it seems, and Kate knew what road they had taken, and—really, you know," cried the Squire, shifting about uneasily, and not looking up in Steven's face, "the story, kept to ourselves, is not so very bad—went after them (I was out of Paris myself), and overtook them at Le Mans. A Miss Long, some friend of Dora's, was travelling with them. As far as appearances go, everything was saved; and then, Kate, like the warm-hearted girl she is, promised Dora forgiveness, and brought her back. Such a wan, miserable, repentant creature as she looked when she returned next morning! Her face would have touched your heart, Lawrence, if you had seen it."

"Would it, sir? Now, I have one further question to ask: *What* was Miss Fane's object in bringing back my wife from her lover? You will not, I suppose, refuse to answer me?"

"Object—object?" stammered the Squire, more embarrassed than ever between the dictates of his own heart and his wish to remember what Katharine had told him to say. "Why, to save her good name and yours while there was yet time, of course. To bring back the poor weak fool to her duty towards you, and—"

"Sir!" cried Steven, with sudden passion in his voice, "do you, does Katharine Fane, suppose that I would take this woman back?"

"We hoped (on my word, I believe I know how I

would act myself!" interpolated the Squire,) "we hoped, when you had looked over all the circumstances of the case, when you had seen that no actual stain rests on your name——"

"Mr. Hilliard," interrupted Steven, "I think I'd better put in a word or two here; it will save misunderstanding between you and me. No stain rests on my name, you say: to the best of my knowledge, I have done nothing yet to incur one; and, in my class of life, a man's own actions are what determine his honour and his dishonour. If Dora, instead of stopping where she has stopped, had run the whole gauntlet of shame there'd be no greater stain on my name than there is now. I'll say more: If she had gone through years and years of open infamy, she could not be less my wife than her intention has made her! She had taken the first step; much better have let her take the rest! Miss Katharine meant well—that I'll never gainsay—but tell Miss Katharine, from me, I'd sooner, a good deal, burn Ashcot with my own hand, than see Dora Fane enter it. We Lawrences are peasants, you know, sir, and in spite of my marriage, and my introduction to a world above me, I've kept my peasant feelings still. The floors of Ashcot have never been trodden yet, to my knowledge, by a wanton."

For a full minute the Squire was struck dumb by the shock of that last word; shock such as a man might feel who, in the midst of addressing condescending platitudes to an uneducated audience, should suddenly find the platform give way beneath him, and, looking up from an undignified position, behold his auditors above his head. It was a deplorable thing,

certainly, that that little 'fool, Dora, should have meditated an elopement: 'twas natural, manly—at first, at least—that Steven Lawrence should rebel against the thought of taking her back. Such rebellion was, indeed, corroborative of all the opinions that he, Mr. Hilliard, had formed of the man's character. But to use language like this! language which from a gentleman, an equal, had been barely justifiable! In sore perplexity, the Squire turned aside; fidgeted, paced quickly three or four times up and down the parlour; then, still without looking up at Steven's face, came and took his place beside him again before the fire. Quite composed, outwardly, Steven was standing; his eyes fixed upon the wall before him, not in any particular degree, it seemed, remembering Mr. Hilliard's anger, or Mr. Hilliard's existence. "You have used language, Lawrence, that, I hope—I'm sure in your cooler moments you will repent of. Language that not even this unhappy occurrence can justify from your lips."

"I've used the fitting language," said Steven: "I've used a word more becoming than any other to apply to your niece and my wife. About time for me, sir," he added, with bitter emphasis, "to call things by their right names! During the last few months I've been accustomed to hear a language in which one word may be used indifferently for truth or falsehood, for honesty or shame. I'll go back now to the vulgar English I learnt as a boy, and call vice, vice, and virtue, if ever I chance to come across it again, virtue." Having said which, he lapsed once more into silence, and the Squire not finding anything particular for him to do or say, took up his hat, and,

doubtful whether he ought to shake hands with Steven, or whether Steven would shake hands with him, began to make his escape, edgeways, towards the door.

"I don't see that this story need be made more public than necessary?" he hesitated, at last, his hand upon the lock.

"That is a matter I've no concern in," said Steven. "I shall neither advertise nor deny it."

"And you refuse, finally, in cool blood, to have any reconciliation with your wife?"

"I do. Whatever sum I can afford to pay for her maintenance I will pay. I will never see her in Ashcot again."

"And," as he spoke the Squire came back across the room, "this, as the poor girl will find shelter under my roof, I have a right to ask—you will not make matters worse by seeking Clarendon Whyte out? by having any meeting with him that could entail further exposure upon Dora?"

"I seek out a meeting with Clarendon Whyte? No, sir; I can promise you, easily enough, on that score!" answered Steven. "I've wasted too much time already on them both, and for the future shall have work and to spare without running after fine gentlemen or their companions. If ever—a year hence, or ten, or twenty—Mr. Clarendon Whyte's evil chance should bring him across my path, I'd be apt to treat him . . . by the Lord! as I treated a snake that got coiled about my body once while I slept!—take him by the throat and knock what brains he has out on the nearest stone that came to hand! 'An eye for an eye, a tooth for tooth,' is what is written, and I know of nothing wiser or juster to supersede that law."

The Squire stood for full two minutes more, nervously crushing the brim of his hat out of shape between his hands: two minutes in which many wild revolutionary ideas flashed before his mind—among others, that a working farmer, whose honour has been betrayed, may feel very much as a country gentleman would feel under the same circumstances. “Lawrence,” he said, at length, holding out his hand, “I don’t see that you and I should not part friends, or that what has happened need make any difference between us. Will you shake hands?”

“Ay, indeed,” said Steven, quite with his accustomed respect, “that I will, and thank you kindly for coming to break this to me yourself. As to making no difference—I can’t agree with you, sir. I can go to your house no more, and it doesn’t seem to me any member of your family could wish to enter mine.”

This, then, was their parting; these were the tidings that the Squire had to bear back to those who were waiting for him so eagerly at the Dene. On learning Steven’s resolve, Katharine fired with indignation; called him cruel, ungenerous, narrow of judgment; then burst into tears, and knew that in her heart she had never more respected him, more sympathised with him than at this moment. Dora, after listening calmly to all her uncle had to tell, remarked that, as far as she could see, everything had happened for the best. It would be a sore trial, doubtless, for her relations, this having to receive her back. For herself, she would much sooner live on bread and water, and in one room, at the Dene, than return to Ashcot. And now another scene—scarcely less dreaded than the first—lay before

the Squire: the breaking to Mrs. Hilliard under what circumstances Theodosia's child had come home, and for what period.

Oh, the length, the interminable length of this first day on which Dora returned into the path of right! Mrs. Hilliard, who had not yet risen, buried her face in her pillow as soon as she heard the news, with the solemn assurance that she should never lift it up again. The blinds were drawn down by her orders all over the house. "Have we not met with dishonour, a calamity worse than death?" she said. The poor little Squire crept up and downstairs in his slippers, not exactly hard in his heart against Dora, but extremely doubtful as to Katharine's wisdom in having brought her back; upset to the last degree by the quantity of thinking he had had to go through since yesterday; ashamed of himself, as dinner-time came, for feeling his usual appetite; ashamed to look his own old servants in the face. The servants, for their part, if they did not know, suspected the worst; and already talked in whispers about the opinions *they* had held of Miss Dora at the best of times. Katharine sat all day at her mother's side, holding her hand, and vainly trying to find soft responses to the invalid's pitiless invectives against the culprit. Dora herself, the least concerned person in the household, passed the time in sleep. What was there to keep awake for, now that she had learnt Steven's decision? If she thought for a week she would never be able to decide whether the boxes that had gone on to Brest would be restored intact, or whether, "as things blew over," any one would ever ask her out again: the only questions of remotest importance to her at present. She was tired, bodily;

heart-sick of everything in heaven and earth; rather sorry, on the whole, to find herself back at the Dene, but still relieved that she was not to go back to Ashcot. And the bedroom they put her into was warm and comfortable, and the only form remorse ever took in her was self-pity; and it was not in her nature to trouble herself about the sufferings of others. What was there to hinder Dora Lawrence from taking her rest now?

So went by the first day; so, with scanty variation, went by a good many weeks. Then the neighbours ceased to send inquiries—ostensibly after Mrs. Hilliard's health—the invalid by degrees began to come down again to the drawing-room; the blinds were drawn up; the servants left off speaking to each other in whispers, and the household, after a constrained, awkward fashion, went back to its old life.

I believe a place left vacant by death could scarcely cast gloom more utter upon a fireside than a place unexpectedly re-filled by such a return as Mrs. Lawrence's. What was to be talked about? The irrevocable past? the shame-covered present? the clouded future? Mrs. Hilliard, as time wore on, ceased to sermonize Dora openly; but every one of her languid movements as she lay, her handkerchief to her eyes, on the sofa; every good book she opened (was this a time, she said, for novel reading?), every remark she made to her husband or to Katharine was, in itself, a sermon. The Squire never sermonized, never spoke an upbraiding word to Dot on the subject of her disgrace; but he knew that the disgrace—bruited, who shall say how? about the country—was matter of common talk, and felt it keenly; lost heart in hunting; hardly liked to

be seen about in the parish; excused himself, two Mondays running, from attending vestry-meetings; grew moody and querulous by his own fireside. A more sharply defined, albeit a greater misfortune he might have borne up against; but to have a niece at one's hearth who had run away, yet not run away; whose husband was indisputably justified in discarding her, yet whose relations were bound, more indisputably still, to uphold her, was so out-of-the-way a calamity, so manifest an upsetting of natural law, as to cut the Squire hopelessly adrift from all his old anchorage.

"If really there *was* any place!" he would say, in moments of expansion to Katharine. "Any place that she could go to just for a time, till people have left off talking, and till your mother gets stronger! I don't repent a bit having brought her home, poor thing, and I wouldn't like her to be harshly treated. Still, if there *was* any place!"

. . . . In which persons who have gone astray could quietly disappear, was what Mr. Hilliard meant; not be sermonized, poor souls! or bullied in any way—only disappear! If there were some blessed innocuous process by which the results of wrong-doing—disgrace to relations, above all—could be wiped out, and the world go on, pleasantly and respectably, as it did before!

Not an uncommon kind of wish, even among people of superior intellect to Mr. Hilliard's!

CHAPTER XXII.

Rehabilitated.

No mysterious city of refuge was discovered; no place of earthly redemption to which Theodosia's child could be translated for the remission of her sins. But by the time the spring evenings were lengthening visibly, the chesnut buds glistening in the avenues round the Dene, an unforeseen relief for Theodosia's sister began dimly to be shadowed forth.

Dora had never thoroughly got over the effects of her dissipated Paris life, the excitement and exposure she went through upon that fatal journey to Le Mans. Her strength, at no time great, had grown gradually less ever since her return home, and now that the east wind blew keen across the foreland, her old winter cough had come back, a colour that owed nothing to art was on her cheeks. "I'm ill because there's nothing to make me want to be well! Ill as I was in the autumn at Ashcot," she would say, whenever Katharine questioned her about her state. "Consult Mr. Huntly? he dosed and blistered to make up a village doctor's Christmas bill! Thank you. You needn't be nervous about me, Kate! People who are wanted to die, people for whom there is no place either on earth or in heaven never *do* die, I have remarked. Steven will have years enough to wait before he can bring a second wife home to Ashcot."

But still the cough grew hollower, the red that was not rouge brighter on her cheeks, and at last, when May had set in, and the *Morning Post* was heralding forth the first gaieties of the season, Dora began to acknowledge that she did feel symptoms of failing

health, and might consult a higher authority than Mr. Huntly with advantage. Not go up for the day merely; have her pulse felt; be told to take care of herself; pay a guinea, and return to Clithero in worse spirits than she went; but be placed, for some weeks at least, under a London physician's care. Have one more look, that is to say, at the treasure where her heart was; see bonnets, and carriages, and streets, instead of the monotonous budding green by which this dull old Dene was bounded; test, practically (what, for aught she knew, was still an open question), whether the world meant to "receive" Steven Lawrence's discarded wife or not.

Mrs. Hilliard, when first consulted about the London plan, showed herself, for about five minutes, unusually open to reason; considered, indeed, that it would be the Squire's plain duty to pay for doctors and apartments—and you could get nice *moderate* apartments towards Russell Square! Then, Katharine chancing to speak of accompanying the invalid to town, she went round in a moment, and denounced the whole proposal as a heartless conspiracy against herself. At home it had been bad enough. During the last three months had Mrs. Ducie, had any of her old friends, done more than leave a formal card of inquiry at the house? To be estranged from the whole of one's county acquaintance was bad enough; still this was a humiliation that Mrs. Hilliard was prepared to bear; as she had borne all other humiliations inflicted upon her by Theodosia's child. For her own daughter, an unmarried girl, to be seen in London at the side of a woman in Dora's position, was not to be spoken of. "I have done everything that my duty as a Christian

has bidden me to do for Dora Lawrence," said Mrs. Hilliard, in the tone of a Cornelia; "but I will not sacrifice the good name of our family any further. Dora has committed a disreputable action. Let her bear the penalties of it by herself."

"But then if she is ill!" pleaded Katharine. "It will be more a matter of nursing, I begin to think, than of being seen by the world, if we do go to London. Mamma, you who know so well what sickness is, would you let her be ill with only servants to wait upon her, in a London lodging?"

"I don't see why not, Kate. I was ill, with only servants to wait upon me when you and Mr. Hilliard left me to run (and a most ill-judged proceeding it was!) after her and her disreputable associates in Paris."

"Disreputable again! Oh, mamma, mamma, let us drop that word. Suppose the poor little creature is worse than we think! Suppose she never gets better! Would she be disreputable, I wonder, when she was in her grave?"

"She would be disreputable *anywhere*," said Mrs. Hilliard, shutting her eyes. "Don't force me to repeat these painful truths so often, child."

To argue rationally with poor Mrs. Hilliard on any subject, from the flavouring of her own calfs'-foot jelly down to the future that might await a human soul beyond the grave, was fruitless. So next morning, Katharine and the Squire went up to London: first to consult with Mrs. Dering, next to find the lodgings in which Dora was to bear the penalty of her want of character, or, if it should so happen, die alone.

A good deal to Mr. Hilliard's astonishment, Mrs.

Dering's opinions were in direct opposition to her mother's. The Squire, like many other single-hearted people, was accustomed to paint character to himself in the blackest black, or whitest white. Arabella was a selfish woman of the world; had never liked Dora at the best of times; would be sure to go dead against her now in her hour of need. And now, in the hour of need, Arabella behaved with greater magnanimity than nineteen out of twenty stronger-hearted, weaker-minded women would have had moral courage to behave! The stupid skin-deep worldliness that seeks to push unwelcome relationships out of sight (miracle as yet unaccomplished!) was not Mrs. Dering's. As long as Dora had merely vacillated on the brink of destruction in Paris, Mrs. Dering remained quiescent. If Dora in very fact had eloped with Clarendon Whyte, Mrs. Dering would have bowed her head to the stroke with a decent dignity impossible for her friends to cavil at. In the present position, Dora—through poor Kate's Quixotism—rescued with singed wings from the burning, the manifest wisdom, nay, the duty of every member of the family was, according to Mrs. Dering, to receive Steven Lawrence's wife as they would wish the world to receive her.

"What, what is relationship worth if it does not make us stand by each other in the dark hour?" she exclaimed, in a tone that made the Squire take out his pocket-handkerchief and feel how much he had hitherto undervalued the sterling qualities of Arabella's heart. "For Dora to be alone in lodgings, and Katharine to visit her, as Katharine, dear child, would surely do, by stealth, would be simply to justify the worst suspicions of others. Steven Lawrence has chosen (on barest

suspicion—his wife and Grizelda Long chancing, on a country excursion, to be accompanied by this Mr. Clarendon Whyte) to quarrel with poor Dora. Let Dora's family show in what light *they* regard his conduct!" And not only was Mrs. Dering opposed to Dora being in lodgings alone. If the poor girl was really in such delicate health as to need a physician's care, why go into lodgings at all? The recent death of General Dering's brother must naturally prevent their entering into the world this season. It had been settled some weeks back that they were to pay a spring visit, children and all, to old Miss Dering down in Hampshire. Why should not Dora have the use of the house in Hertford Street, Katharine with her, in their absence? "Tell mamma, at least, that this is my proposal," Mrs. Dering finished. "Also, that as long as conscience tells me I am acting right I will never be afraid of what the world can say of me!"

. . . "In short, the whole of Arabella's virtues may be illustrated by one old French proverb," said Dot, when the good offer—accepted on the spot by poor fickle Mrs. Hilliard—was repeated to her. "*Rien ne ressemble mieux à un honnête homme qu'un fripon.*" See in Clithero how these good honest priests and Levites pass by on the other side when they meet me in the lanes or coming out of church! Arabella, taught by the Christianity of higher worldliness, by the broad gospel of expediency, invites me to her house and shines forth—a Samaritan!"

But, though she could not hear of Arabella's invitation without some leaven of the old bitterness rising to her tongue, Dora did not hesitate for a second about taking advantage of it. The long-lost dress-cases had,

after much misadventure, found their way from Brest to Clithero; and in better spirits than she had felt since the day of Lady Sarah's masquerade, Mrs. Lawrence at once set about re-packing them for her "season in London,"—so she persisted in calling this forlorn last hope upon which she was about to venture! Who should say she was not going to enjoy herself? It was all a chance! She might continue too weak to risk the fatigue of balls, or she might get stronger and be out every night of her life. Who should say that the world, any more than Arabella, was going to support Steven in his eccentricity? At all events, there could be no harm done by taking the dresses. It would be amusement to look at them oneself sometimes, even if there was no opportunity of letting them be seen! So late in the May twilight (the peaceful country silence round the house, the peaceful spring sky overhead), Katharine looking in through a half-opened door, saw the little figure busy, and singing over her fripperies! stopping ever and awhile—tired even by their slight weight, her hand to her side—then on again . . . Satins, silks, feathers: ammunition for a whole campaign of dissipation: the newest sacks for the morning, the newest redingotes for the afternoon; toilettes for balls, for theatres, for dinners; even the blue and silver page-dress stowed away . . . Poor butterfly soul—as if ball travesty should be needed by her more in this world!

They went up to London, and for a few days Dora's spirits continued excellent. People might talk as they liked of the superiority of country air. No air so good in reality as what you got in cities. It stood to reason, all the fires must warm it into a state fit for human lungs! Then, no visitors having called,

and the old Countess de Castro chancing to look the other way when she drove past the cousins in the park, she drooped. Who that had been brought up in Paris could feel well in this horrible, smoky, dingy London? Now might be seen to what Steven's injustice had led! The world of course knew of their separation, and of course took the husband's part. "As to Madame de Castro," cried Dot, her pinched face firing, "I would like to know the secrets of *her* youth. Oh the hypocrisy, the cant, the injustice of these hard old women of the world!"

Next morning, yielding to Katharine's wish, she for the first time saw a physician. He was a man noteworthy throughout Europe; able at mental as at bodily diagnosis; and nothing could be apter than his treatment of this poor querulous little creature, who—vainly fretting to keep in life's highway still—was already so far upon the narrow path to death. He heard, with admirable assumption of its being unimportant, the fact that both Dora's parents had died, prematurely, of decline; heard attentively, not with too ominous gravity, her accounts of herself; listened keenly to the fluttering heart, the uneven breath; ordered her to be highly nourished, a great deal in the open air; made her smile at one or two bits of latest London gossip; and when Katharine followed him downstairs, and besought him to tell the whole truth, told it. The case was absolutely without hope. Mrs. Lawrence might possibly live for some time; but the hereditary disease was complicated by affection of the heart, and her friends ought to know that she might die at any instant. Her mind must be kept at rest; this above everything; and, if it was possible to amuse

her without late hours or excitement, let her be so amused. Medicine could be of no avail in such a case, but he would call sometimes to see how the patient went on. Then he shook the hand of his white-cheeked questioner (holding it a second with gentle professional pressure, half sympathetic, half acknowledgment of the delicately tendered fee), rolled away in his brougham to hear the tidings of life or death to other houses and Katharine had to go back to the drawing-room and command her voice and face as she best might, while poor unconscious Dot chattered over the results of the doctor's visit.

After all she was not so very ill. That was plain from his manner. Her malady, as she had always maintained, must be on the nerves, or why had he ordered her no medicine and constant distractions? "He must be a really clever man, mind you, Kate; goes, as I have always heard, straight to the cause of the complaint. Want of amusement is death to me. Now, the thing is, with the Countess de Castro, and all the rest of them cutting one, how to be amused?"

How, indeed? A butterfly soul, *in extremis*, to be diverted, and all means of butterfly diversion shut out; all the associates of brighter butterfly hours tuning away. Neither Madame de Castro nor any other of their former friends showed coldness to Katharine, except incidentally, as Mrs. Lawrence's companion. Katharine Fane, the future Lady Petres, warm-hearted and generous as ever, was endeavouring to uphold her cousin in an untenable position: an endeavour, in her position, worthy rather of praise than blame. But Mrs. Lawrence! what could be done but hold aloof from this wretched little Mrs. Lawrence? A woman who on

excellent authority had completely lost herself in Paris! (Was not Grizelda Long still living, still letter writing, in Le Mans station or elsewhere? Was not Clarendon Whyte in existence—at a wise distance from Dora's "savage of a husband," but not more reticent than his code of honour bade him be as to Dora's reputation?) Had been saved only through poor little Lord Petres rescuing her by force from running away with such a man as Clarendon Whyte! Really, in these days, a line must be drawn somewhere. Mrs. Lawrence, painful though it was to one's feelings, must be ignored, and the world ignored her! From common acquaintances Katharine received invitations—curtly rejected always—with no corresponding invitation for Dora. Katharine's old friends wrote her notes, hoping, as they were "sorry to hear sickness was in the house," she would come and see them quietly any morning she liked to fix. What amusement for a small excommunicated sinner, to whom amusement had been prescribed, could be got out of a world in these rigid dispositions?

They drove regularly of an afternoon in the park; Dot pink and white as ever, bedecked in the Parisian toilettes, for which, only a few short weeks ago, la belle Bébé had been celebrated in the Champs Elysées. Alas! how she had fallen now! During every drive she was sure to discover some new mortification; some bow pointedly given over her head to Katharine; some once-friendly face turned aside; every afternoon she was sure to return home wearier in body, sicker, more despondent in soul. "I wish when doctors order amusement as a medicine, they would furnish one with a prescription for getting it made up!" she would say. "Ah, Kate, Kate, you should have let me go my own

way! Perhaps, if I had really done something wrong, people would have been less hard upon me—for everything in this world seems to go by injustice. Oh, will *any one* give me a kind word, will any one send me an invitation again before I die!"

Some one gave her a kind word, some one sent her an invitation before she died. With the first days of June, Lord Petres came back to London, bringing with him George Gordon; and George Gordon, who, by Dot's account, had "never loved" her in her palmy days of Parisian celebrity, now, in her time of broken health and fallen estate, became, at once—was it not his office to succour the wounded?—her friend. Lord Petres had it in his power to do as much towards the restoration of a drooping character as any one in London. And although Lord Petres, left to himself, was not a man to incur personal exertion without due cause, he soon found, with Katharine urging him, and George Gordon as Katharine's coadjutor, that his best chance of future peace lay in present obedience. The Countess de Castro and a dozen other old friends now passed Dora daily, without bowing. No matter. The Duchess of St. Alwys, the austere, most exclusive, most catholic woman in England, a woman with the blue blood of royalty in her veins, was about to give a morning concert. And to this concert—so George Gordon and Katharine Fane decided in secret conclave—Dora Lawrence, through Lord Petres' influence, should be asked.

No need in the fast-closing story of a yeoman's life to record the strategies, the feints and counter-feints, by which the entrance to an exclusive London drawing-room can be forced. Enough that it was

forced; that Dora, ignorant of the hard-fought battle that had been waged for her, did, at the eleventh hour, receive a card of invitation to the Duchess of St. Alwyns' concert, and felt herself, then and there (as though repute, like nobility, could be conveyed by letters patent!) rehabilitated. The Countess de Castro—a foreign countess! Lady Dacres—the widow of a baronet! Who were these women, and what mattered their verdicts *now*? She got up, unmindful of her weakness, and danced about the room in an ecstasy. She rushed upstairs to look over her dresses: then—finding nothing fresh enough for the occasion, nothing but what, even if unworn, had lost its primeval bloom in travelling—away to Bruton Street, and the milliner. "I want a toilette for the day after to-morrow, for the Duchess of St. Alwyns' morning concert," she cried, growing taller at the delicious sound of that word, "duchess." Poor Dot—reduced to rehearsing her triumphs before milliners' assistants! "Let me see the newest—not fashion, but the newest prophecy of fashion from Paris."

Neither that day nor the next would she drive in the park. "When I show myself in public again," she said, "it will be as the friend of the Duchess of St. Alwyns. I am sorry you are not invited, Kate!" In her eagerness to serve Dora, Katharine had forgotten to have her own name included in the invitation. "But another time I'll take care to have you asked. The duchess has evidently heard of me from some one in Paris; most likely from some one who saw me at that very ball which, in *prejudiced* eyes was the crown of my wrong doing; and asks me, I suppose, in my poor little way, as a celebrity."

She could scarcely eat or sleep with excitement till the moment arrived when the name of Steven Lawrence's wife was announced in her Grace of St. Alwyns' reception-rooms: the blissful moment heralding in three mortal hours of heat, of classical music, of neglect: George Gordon's the only face she knew, the only voice that spoke to her: but from which Dot issued forth with triumphant step, with radiant face (heat, fatigue, neglect, forgotten)—the Duchess of St. Alwyns' friend!

She drove home like one in a dream, in rapture approaching what she had felt when she walked with the Squire in her first long dress and cream-coloured gloves in Paris; ran upstairs, unheeding of her throbbing heart and shortened breath, and threw herself into Katharine's arms. "The Countess de Castro not there, nor the Dacres—only the very first people in London, and—and poor George Gordon! how in the world could he have got an invitation? And the duchess was charming, and the duke too. . . . I shall be asked to all their parties! Oh, Katharine, what a new world I see before me!"

Nothing would content her but driving that same afternoon in the park. Tired? What had there been to tire her? The doctor had ordered her to take advantage of every sunny day, and to-day was perfect midsummer! So, rather than thwart her, Katharine got herself ready, and in another half-hour—Dot overdressed, flushed; with the lustre of excitement in her eyes—they were driving along at snails' pace in the line of carriages that thronged the entrance to Hyde Park.

"Look cold, my Countess de Castro! Bow over me

as you like, my Lady Dacres! Sadducees, whited sepulchres, that you are! Wait till to-morrow—wait till you have seen my name in to-morrow's *Morning Post*! Oh, Kate dear! how I enjoy driving along and looking at them in their ignorance! Oh, how warm the sun is—how well I feel; it seems to me that I've a hundred more years of life before me at least."

When they had proceeded further—were no longer driving at snails' pace among the crowd—her mood changed. "However warm the sun is in London, you always feel a chill under its warmth," she cried. "I feel it at this moment. Kate;" with sudden earnestness this; "whatever becomes of me, I hope I shan't be buried in England. I don't believe in ghosts, still it's well to guard against every possibility, and my ghost, if I had one, would never lie quiet, I know, in this damp, cold ground."

Katharine turned away her face. "A ghost in brocaded silk and Parisian bonnet! What has put such nonsense into your head, Dot?"

"Who knows? Where do all our thoughts, good or foolish, wise or wicked, come from? But I don't mean it for nonsense, I can tell you. I've thought the same thing, often before, and now I may as well say it out. Don't, if you can help it, let me be buried in England, above all in Clithero."

Katharine tried to speak, but the words died on her lips.

"There is the expense, I know, but you have been so generous to me all along I don't think you would mind that, and then, there's nearly the whole of my thousand pounds still left. Would it cost very much, I wonder, to take one over—*like that*—to Père la

Chaise? The side facing Paris is my favourite. I can see it now, green and sunny as it was when Delphine and Alfred took me with them that Sunday, and we had our dinner on the grass. I shan't be wanted at home. There'll be no more place for me in Clithero dead, than there has been living. Uncle Frank, poor, good Uncle Frank! would be horribly embarrassed at having to open the family-vault for me, and I don't choose to lie among the Lawrences—the wives, and mothers, and grandmothers who have led 'honest lives' in Ashcot. The odour of so much sanctity would stifle me in my coffin. I'd like to lie where the work-girls from Paris could come and laugh and chatter with their sweethearts, over-head on Sundays. I'd like—I was never sentimental before—but I'd like the Paris sun to shine over my grave; I'd like of a winter's night that some sound of Paris, if 'twas only the striking of the distant clocks, should reach me where I lay. They need put up no grand stone; just a low slab with 'Dora' (not Lawrence) on it, to keep me from being disturbed."

It was late when they got back to Hertford Street, and Dot declared herself too weary to go upstairs and undress. She would be glad to have some tea, and rest, as she was, in the drawing-room. "I'm tired—tired to death!" she said, going up before the same glass in which she had contemplated herself on the evening of Steven's first arrival. "But, without vanity, I may say I never remember myself looking better. What was all that nonsense I talked awhile since about ghosts and churchyards? Katharine," she turned from the glass and seated herself beside the window; the

sun-set slanting in upon her small figure, upon the rose-brocaded dress, the white lace bonnet, the sunken hectic face; "there's something . . . I am tired . . . I shall be better when they bring the tea . . . something I want to ask you. The Cowpers are going to have a fancy-ball on the twenty-first; I heard so to-day, and I know Lord Petres can get me an invitation. Do you think—if I go—I may wear the same dress I wore in Paris? It had a great success—not an artist there but was charmed with it—the . . . the blue . . . and silver—"

Her head fell back heavily; and Katharine in a moment was at her side. They carried her to her bed: the physician was summoned; a telegraphic message sent to Clithero—and when the young June morning broke, when the swallows were twittering on the roofs, Dot lay still and at peace.

No more dread of lukewarm friends; no more need of noble patronage. A rehabilitation had been wrought which even Lady Dacres, even the Countess de Castro, must accept as final!

CHAPTER XXIII.

Once More!

Two volumes have been filled in recording one year of Steven Lawrence's life. The progress of the next can be told in almost as many pages.

Is it not so in the actual experience of every one of us? A month, or two or three months, will yield amplest materials—rich colour, depth of passion; warmth, vigour, life; materials for a great deal more than one poor two-volume story! The history of the next year,

or dozen years, may be summed up in a short sentence: "This man or woman continued to exist."

Steven Lawrence, after his return from Paris, continued to exist for another twelve months in Ashcot. He did more than exist,—he worked. From the moment in which the story of Dora's disgrace, variously amplified, became known, it had been decided by all the gossips in Clithero that Steven Lawrence would give up his farm, to a tenant or a purchaser, and return again to his "old wild ways" abroad. His heart had never been rightly in the land. Something, indefinable even to Clithero wisdom, had been wrong with the lad from the first. His life had been set awry—there was the truth!—by getting mixed up with the Squire's family. He had been made too high for his own station, and now—now could be seen how much store those of a higher class had set on him! As a matter of course he would part from his land (not a few persons held decided opinions as to which portion Lord Haverstock would buy, and which the Squire), and go abroad again: and about the best thing the poor fellow could do. What good could a man of his age come to with a solitary fireside, old Barbara for his companion, and never a man in the parish, gentleman or labourer, that he could take for a friend?

So said the Clithero world; and the Clithero world was wrong. Whatever were Steven Lawrence's intentions for the future, it soon became evident that, for the present, he would hold on to Ashcot. On the same Sunday that Dora was brought back to Clithero, he made his appearance at Shiloh for the evening service—looking ten years older, the village girls whispered to each other; but with head erect, dressed, not as his

wife had always made him dress, but in his old yeoman fashion; and with self-possessed demeanour, too unobtrusive, too quiet, to be aught but genuine; the demeanour of a man not so much seeking to brave off, as to disallow, the suspicion of personal disgrace. Next morning at day-break he was up and out with his men. "My wife is dead to me," he said briefly to Barbara, as he left the house (the story had been told her yesterday). "You will see that everything belonging to her is sent back to the Dene: and from this moment forth we will mention her name no more. You and I will be alone together for the future." Then he went away to the fields; put his hand to the plough, the harrow—to whatever work was being done on the farm that morning, returned at noon, dined as he used to do in the kitchen, worked again till dusk. After this—the kitchen fireside and his pipe, Barbara, death-silent, with her sewing opposite, till bed-time!

And this day varied, as far as work went, by the changing seasons; and only so varied; was the pattern following which the succeeding year went by: for Dora's death made absolutely no change in his condition. He never put on mourning for her, thereby showing disrespect, it must be allowed, towards the family at the Dene, but the principles of a Christian man, said the Elders of Shiloh. (No sickly apologists for human frailty! Men who speaking on such subjects would quote you the grand old written law of stoning unto death without the camp sooner than any later instance of that law's infringement. Dora Lawrence had sinned: in sinning had ceased to be Steven's wife as much as if all the judges in England had divorced them. Should the husband she had sinned against,

mock the Lord's house by wearing mourning in it for a castaway?) He refused firmly, quietly, to accept any remaining portion of her marriage-dower, when offer of its payment was made to him through Mr. Hilliard's solicitor. The money had never been his: he had no right to receive it; and he took this opportunity of saying, with his duty to the Squire, that he hoped by Christmas to pay back all that had been advanced him for the improvement of his land. When he went beyond the farm, which was seldom, and chanced to meet Mr. Hilliard, he would salute him just with the simple respect of his boyish days, but with no more than "How are you, Lawrence? how goes the farm?" and "Well, I thank you, sir," passing on either side. Twice,—twice only,—he met Katharine Fane; and each time they bowed, then; with quick-averted eyes, like people who shrank guiltily from each other's presence, went on their way . . . the past, and all the love it held, as rigidly dead as though a dozen winters had frozen above its grave! He was friendly still, on matters of horse-dealing, with Lord Haverstock, but no more. (Despite her horror of the "gentry's ways," Barbara thought, at times, she would sooner see him drinking French wines or playing cards like young Josh again, than leading the death-in-life that he was leading now!) Other society he had none. Once, with pride smitten, with his heart desolate, he had been able to sink, by intervals, at least, to the level of Mills and his associates; had been able to seek forgetfulness in such sources as men of their stamp term pleasure. This was impossible to him now. The barest thought of dissipation, coarse or refined, filled him with loathing—did not dissipation remind him of Paris? And so, in

his ignorance, he fell passively back upon the companionship that wise men declare to be the most efficient of all consolation,—the companionship of solitude and work!

Work, if it brought nothing else, brought its own material reward. By Christmas his debt to the Squire was paid off. By the following spring there was promise of such crops in Ashcot as the land had never been made to yield since Joshua Lawrence's death. Waving weed-free grass fields; well-kept potato ridges; the young corn green and upright; the orchard showing abundant signs of autumn plenty; and for whom—for what? Tired with work as Steven was returning one night from early grass-cutting—this ever recurring question vexing his heart—a sharp bend in one of the lanes near Ashcot brought him suddenly upon the Squire. The usual salutation was exchanged between them, and Steven had already passed a step or two down the lane, when Mr. Hilliard reined in his horse, and turning, held out his hand. "Lawrence," he cried, "you're just the man I wanted to meet! I've a message for you—come, shake hands, lad! don't keep up ill blood for ever—I've a message for you from Kate. You won't refuse to listen to it, I suppose?"

A flush rose over Steven's sunburnt face. "Of course I will listen, sir, to anything that you or—or Miss Katharine choose to say to me."

"Well, let the past be past then, and be friends with us! Katharine's marriage is fixed, as I suppose you've heard, for the nineteenth, not a week hence, and she wants you to come to it. A very quiet affair it will be—not above a dozen people present. It grieves

Katharine, and Lord Petres too, that you should continue to be estranged from us."

"They are very good, both of them," said Steven, turning away his face. "Tell Miss Katharine, please, that I am grateful for her kind intention in asking me. As to going, sir—you must know how impossible it would be for me to do that!"

"Well, well," said the Squire, "if I speak honestly, I expected nothing less—only a year past, poor thing! and . . . ah, well, no need to open old wounds afresh. If you won't come to the wedding, Lawrence, will you come and dine with me next Tuesday? This is my invitation, mind. Petres is coming down on some settlement business, and I am going to ask one or two of the Clithero people, yourself among them, to meet him. A men's party only. Kate is still in London with her sister, and poor Mrs. Hilliard is too ill, I'm sorry to say, to appear. Now mind, I shall take it as a show of personal ill-feeling to me if you refuse. Lord Petres, Katharine, all of us, wish the past to be done with. Surely this is a time when old wrongs should be forgotten."

Then Steven looked up quickly at the Squire. "The past can never be done with," said he; "nor wrongs forgotten. I'm not that sort of man; and, indeed, my wish, as long as I remain in the old country, is to have nothing to do with any kind of society again. However, sir," he added, "I accept your invitation; I will dine with you. It would ill become me, after all your kindness, were I churl enough to refuse."

And when he got home, for the first time for months past, Steven made mention of the Squire's family to Barbara. "I'm going to dine at the Dene next Tues-

day, there's news for you! I'm going to dinner-parties among lords and gentry once more. Lord Petres is coming down from London, and the wedding-day is fixed for the nineteenth. To think we never knew it! We are like people living in a prison, Barbara, you and I! never hear a bit of what's going on now-a-days."

He sat down in his accustomed place beside the hearth, and for a minute or more talked on quickly, jestingly, of lords and ladies, of gossip and of weddings. Then, in a second, his voice broke—his face sank down between his hands—and Barbara, awe-struck, crept from the kitchen and left him alone. After a year's stoicism it had come to this. Nature was stronger than he: the man's stout heart had given way at last.

So much for Steven: now for the manner in which Katharine, in her differently-ordered life, had continued during the past twelvemonth to exist. The story again is short. Through many a weary month after Dora's death she rose, went to rest, went to church, visited the poor at Clithero; endured, until she sickened at her own endurance, the sight of the low white walls of Ashcot across the bay. Then, when spring came round, yielding to Mrs. Dering's entreaty, went up to London, and by degrees drifted back—what with lost delight in life, with paralyzed energy, can one do but drift?—into the old London routine of two years ago.

The day on which she was to become Lord Petres' wife was settled for her (their marriage had been put off in November by reason of her mourning), and she saw Lord Petres for an hour daily, at her sister's house, and at times tried to persuade herself she was growing to love him. And Mrs. Dering took her to dinners

and to operas; and if she found no zest in conquering, she at least went back easily into the old habit of making conquests. And she dressed, with a certain languid renewal of interest in her own beauty; and now—at the time Steven was busy with his grass-cutting—was deep in the counsels of jewellers and mantua-makers for her trousseau. Katharine Fane went on existing; as common opinion goes, went on living; and a very enviable pleasant life, too. Aged, a good deal, people said; had never looked the same after that dreadful misalliance of her cousin Dora's; and, it was sadly visible, cared no more for poor little Lord Petres than ever! But *heart* did not belong to the Fane nature. Look at Mrs. Dering, placid and contented with her terrible old General! Look at Mrs. Dering, and you could see the future Lady Petres; handsome, popular, decorous; ice-cold to everything in the universe as to her own household. Thus prophesied the world, and truly; Katharine, herself, would have been the first to endorse the truth of the prophecy.

Her marriage-day, I say, was now fixed—not a week distant; and one afternoon, the same brightness in the London streets that there had been on the afternoon of Dora's death, she found herself driving home with Mrs. Dering after a long last visit on bridal business to the milliner. With a repugnance she would scarcely acknowledge to herself, Katharine had hitherto shrunk from trying on her wedding dress; and to-day, for the first time, had seen, shuddering as she saw, the reflection of the future Lady Petres veiled, wreathed with orange blossom, as she would stand before the altar. A beautiful sight in the sisterly eyes of Mrs.

Dering—an awful one to herself; a sight that made her cheeks turn crimson, then white, and every pulse in her body throb with shame. "Steven, Steven, if it had been for him!" All through the sunny crowded streets as they drove along, and while Mrs. Dering talked in cheerful tones over the details of the approaching marriage this cry rose from her heart. Oh, white wedding dress! oh, speaking of holiest vows—if all had been for him! How had the marriage feast been a consecrated one; the dress symbolic indeed of a heart given, in the whiteness of love, to its new allegiance; the vows not legal stipulations of a deed-of-sale, in the keeping of whose barren letter a cold future would be spent, but love-promises, through tenderest fulfilment of whose spirit all the years to come had been made sweet.

Steven, Steven! His name rang through her brain with a persistency that grew at last into a positive bodily torture; and so, to still it—as a child seeks to still a ghost-terror by calling on it aloud—she forced herself, with trembling lips, to bring out his name. "Steven Lawrence won't come to my wedding, Bella, did you know? but he accepted the invitation, papa tells me, to dine with them yesterday. Perhaps it's natural he should stay away—from the wedding, I mean—but I'm glad to think he has dined once more at the Dene, and that he and Lord Petres have met. I'd like to think," something in the sound of her voice made this a question, "that I should see his face once more in this world?"

"And why should you not see it as many more times as you choose?" replied Mrs. Dering, with characteristic generosity. "Steven Lawrence's position

has been awkward as regards you hitherto, from the warm way in which you espoused poor Dora's part. But time softens everything. You and Lord Petres both like Steven Lawrence. I should think nothing would be easier and kinder than for you to invite him to Eccleston."

"But before long he will have left England for ever," said Katharine. "I hear—at second-hand, that's to say; it's more than a year since he has spoken to me; but the people in Clithero all declare Steven Lawrence means to sell his farm, and return to America. No opportunity of being kind to him with the Atlantic between us!"

"Then ask him to Eccleston without delay," said Mrs. Dering; "though, really, in these days, a man's going to India or America scarcely seems to separate him from his friends more than his going to Ireland. Space is *so* relative, and—and talking of India we have left out Freddy Marsland. Is there time yet, do you think, to send him a note?" And then again the conversation went back to the wedding-breakfast, and the wedding-guests, and continued in the same channel until they drove up before Mrs. Dering's house in Hertford Street.

A lad, in the red and blue uniform at sight of which so many a heart has turned cold, was standing before the front door as the carriage stopped. "Tom!" cried Mrs. Dering aloud ('Tom was the Derings' eldest son at school at Brighton); "Steven!" said Katharine's heart: both women's fears going at once to what was dearest to them on earth. Mrs. Dering leaned forward and beckoned the messenger to the carriage. She was not generally a weak or an impulsive woman, but her

hand shook as she took the envelope and glanced at its address.

"Thank God!" she cried. "Kate, my dear," handing it to Katharine, "the message is to you. It can't be very important!"

Katharine broke open the seal: the telegram was from Lord Petres; and by some quicker process than reading she knew its contents. "I must go down to Clithero," quite steady-voiced she began; then turned, with a face all changed and bloodless, to her sister: "I have not a minute to lose."

"Kate, Kate, what has happened? Mamma—Lord Petres?"

"Steven Lawrence has had a fall from his horse. He is badly hurt; and I am going to him. It is a quarter past six now," for she had taken out her watch, and was looking at it. "I shall be in time for the seven o'clock train from London Bridge. Do you go with me, Bella?"

"Go with you? can you ask such a question? Of course—if you really think our presence necessary—I go with you." And now, a servant having come out of the house, Mrs. Dering sent such messages as were needful to the General; among others that she believed Miss Fane and herself would return by the latest train to-night; and the sisters drove away.

For a long time not a word passed between them. At last, as they were going through the city, Mrs. Dering laid her hand on Katharine's. "Collect yourself, dearest," she said. "Remember Lord Petres' feelings, above everything——"

"Don't talk to me!" said Katharine, shrinking as though a touch were agony to her. "*I can't hear it!*"

And then "Steven, Steven!" the old burthen, death-toned now, rang through her heart. They were not divided finally, it seemed. She was destined to look upon his face once more in this world.

CHAPTER XXIV.

For Life or Death.

THE twilight was deepening fast as they stopped before the arched stone entrance of Ashcot farm.

"Thank God you are here, Huntly!" said a voice, and at the same instant the Squire appeared at the door of the carriage. "I was afraid What, Katharine, Bella, only you! I hoped it was the surgeon from town. Lord Petres telegraphed for him hours ago, and as it was possible he might be here by this train, Huntly promised to be at the station to meet him."

"And how is he, papa? How is poor Steven going on?" said Mrs. Dering, when they had got out of the carriage. "You are to wait for us here"—this to the lad who had driven them from the station—"How is he? Lord Petres' telegram was so short, and we were so extremely anxious, that—"

"Papa," interrupted Katharine, abruptly (she was standing almost on the spot where she had stood with Steven that night she rejected him, two years ago! there was the mulberry tree, whose boughs he had lifted aside for her to pass; there were the old-fashioned flower-plots; there was the low farm-house, with unaccustomed lights shining in its windows to-night): "tell me the truth . . . is Steven——"

"—Steven has had as narrow an escape as ever

man had of his life," cried the Squire, quickly. "Still, Kate, you know we must trust in Providence, and Huntly seems to speak well about the broken arm, and—and for the rest, we must await the opinion of the London surgeon. The poor fellow suffers horribly when we attempt to move him," went on Mr. Hilliard, unconscious of the torture he inflicted upon one of his hearers; "so, at Petres' request, he has been left quiet downstairs, just where they first laid him. Nay, Kate," for while he was speaking, Katharine had turned away towards the house, "Petres is here, and I will call him, if you like, to speak to you, but you had better stay outside. Huntly says the only thing we can do at present is to keep the patient perfectly quiet, and his poor old servant is watching over him."

"And how—*how* did it happen?" said Mrs. Dering. "A broken arm! I had no idea it was so terribly serious. Kate, dearest, papa is right. We must not run a risk of disturbing him." Mrs. Dering would have taken her sister's hand, but again Katharine shrank away from her touch. "Was it a trial of a horse, or what? We know nothing, except the miserable truth that the accident took place."

"It happened," said the Squire, lowering his voice, "because Lawrence wanted to get rid of his life! Till the hour of my death I'll say that. Petres does nothing but reproach himself about it, but I say no man would have ridden at the fence Lawrence did in cold blood, and with his brain unheated by wine, unless he had been tired of his life."

Upon hearing this Katharine turned and came back a step or two. In the glimmering twilight Mrs. Dering could mark that a shade one degree more livid than

before had overspread her face. "Tell me about the accident, papa. I can bear it. Tell me word for word what happened, and then—then I will go in and see him."

"Well, you remember, Kate, how you bade me ask him to dinner? I asked him; forced him to say 'yes'—there's the folly for which *I* reproach myself," added the Squire, huskily, "and he came. During dinner I don't suppose he spoke a dozen words . . . natural enough he should be constrained—bitter thoughts of old days, his own marriage-breakfast, held in that very room, overcame him no doubt . . . and I must say received all Petres' attempts at conversation pretty curtly. At last, when the wine came in, he began to thaw; drank glass after glass, not so much like a man enjoying himself, as like one resolved to bring up his spirits to a certain point, and by-and-by grew noisy—as I had never seen him in his life. Haverstock was there, and Jack Ducie, and I needn't tell you the talk soon got to horses. Every one had his story to tell of exploits, hair-breadth, as all after-dinner exploits are, and at last Steven Lawrence told his. Some story about a leap, you girls won't need to hear the details of—"

"No, no, papa. Oh, *go on!*" interrupted Mrs. Dering, with agitation.

"—A leap that he took years ago on a little Mustang of his in Mexico. When the story was told every one at the table remained silent for a moment. Then Petres turned—he was sitting next to poor Steven—"Lawrence," he remarked, in his solemn way, 'this really is a most astonishing fact. Would you mind repeating it again? I should wish to record *how* many feet this little Mustang of yours covered?' 'My lord!' cries Steven, looking round,

flushed and excited, 'do you mean to doubt the truth of what I say, then?' 'Not in the least,' not in the least, said Petres. 'I merely want to know, as a fact worthy of recordal, how many feet this little Mustang of yours is said to have covered?' Well," went on the Squire, "I'll make a short story of what followed. Steven lost himself. There's the truth of it! Said he wasn't going to have his word doubted by any man, was ready to take exactly the same leap, measured, on his half-bred Irish mare, and back himself for whatever amount my lord chose. 'But, my dear sir, I am not a betting-man,' said Petres, with admirable temper. 'I am profoundly ignorant in such matters, and only imagined the leap to be an extraordinary one. If anything I said implied a disbelief in your statement I retract it, or rather apologize to you at once.'"

"So like Lord Petres!" murmured Mrs. Dering in parenthesis.

"Well, you know—no, you don't know what it is to reason with a man only half sober! 'I want no apology,' said Steven. 'I want nothing more from any man than that he should hold to what he says. We needn't make the bet a high one, my lord,' he added, 'if you are really so averse to backing your opinion.' To have argued with him," said the Squire, "would have been worse than to let him have his way. The hour for deciding the bet was fixed for twelve o'clock the next day, Haverstock and myself as umpires, and soon afterwards the party broke up. Neither I nor any one at the table expected that Steven, in cold blood, would wish to hold by such a madman's wager, and when he made his appearance at the appointed hour next day we affected, all of us, to treat the matter

as a joke. 'I never say a thing over-night that I am not prepared to stand to in the morning,' said he, coolly. 'I was heated with wine when I told the story, and I spoke unjustifiably to you, my lord,' turning to Petres. 'I beg to apologize for my language; and now, if you please, gentlemen, we will go on with business. I have plenty of work to do carting my hay to-day.'

"Kate, child," went on the Squire, after a moment or two, "you will understand, better than Arabella, what sort of leap it was that Steven backed himself to take. You remember Hatchett's field? the end, I mean, bounded by the sunk fence, and with the steep brooken bank, half stones, half bushes, on the other side?"

"I remember," said Katharine, shortly. "Go on. I remember it."

"Well, Steven chose the very gap where the drain is widest (we measured, and found it as near as possible equal to the distance he boasted of having covered on his Mustang), a gap seven or eight feet broad between the alder bushes that fringe all that end of the field. Now I don't call it by any means an impossible leap," said the Squire, growing excited, "but I call it one of the nastiest, most treacherous leaps a man well mounted could take, and Steven *wasn't* well mounted! That Irish half-bred of his is as clever a mare as I ever saw across a close country—to the last, Haverstock thought indeed she could do it—but she had neither strength nor courage for such a fence as this. Long before they reached the ditch I saw from the way she went how it would end. Steven was able to keep her head pretty straight during the gallop; but at the very moment she rose, well though he lifted her to her work, the mare swerved violently aside. A moment

later we saw her struggling in vain to make good her landing among the stones and bushes of the opposite bank; then she rolled back heavily, crushing her rider beneath her, into the ditch. Haverstock and I were the first to reach the spot. We extricated Steven as well as we could from beneath the mare, who was unhurt, and found him stunned, and with a face like death. I tried to raise him—he was like a log in my hands—his right arm dropped loosely at his side. By this time Petres had come up. He knelt down—poor little Petres in the muddy ditch, and Steven opened his eyes. ‘I was a fool, my lord,’ he said. ‘A headstrong idiot ’twas no fault of yours!’ then fainted. And we brought him home.”

Without uttering a word, Katharine walked on to the porch. The house-door stood open; Steven’s favourite terrier sat outside, gazing with head erect down the path, as though in his dog-wisdom he knew succour might come that way for his master, and moved aside, without bark of welcome or of warning, for her to pass. There was no need, Katharine felt, for her to ring; no need to ask if she could be admitted! The presence which sets ceremony at nought was upon Ashcot; Barbara, forgetful of everything save him she watched, had, for the first time for forty years, left doors and windows open to-night. With her heart throbbing till every throb was agony, she went past the little parlour; was conscious rather than saw that Lord Petres stood within; then on to the kitchen. The door stood open, a hand-lamp flickering in its socket was on the mantelshelf, the embers of a few smouldering logs upon the hearth cast a soft red glow around; and there, on a bed hastily put together upon an old-

fashioned wooden stretcher, she saw Steven; Barbara, her head bowed down within her hands, sitting beside him.

He lay, as they had brought him home, in his riding-clothes; his broken arm, with the coat-sleeve cut asunder, resting, in its splints and bandages, upon his chest; the other motionless at his side; his face white as a face dead since yesterday. Katharine Fane walked forward; stood by Steven Lawrence, gazed at him, then sank—strong contrast to that homely farm-kitchen in her gleaming silk, her London bonnet, her delicate laces! at his side. And upon this, Barbara lifted her head, recognised what visitor had come here, and rising (stately, implacable even in extremity of her own great sorrow,) stood and watched her. . . . This fine lady who had come, in her lady's gewgaws, to enact some last pretence of grief, some last foolery of remorse by the death-bed of the man who had loved her, and whom she had ruined!

Presently came the sound of steps, the stealthy rustle of another silk dress down the narrow passage; and Mrs. Dering and Lord Petres stood at the kitchen-door. Katharine's senses told her that they were there, as her senses told her the clock had given warning to strike, that a moth was beating round the lamp on the mantelshelf. Her heart knew one thing only: that Steven, her life, lay before her dying! Minute after minute she knelt there; not even Barbara seeking to interrupt her; knelt there, tearless, speechless, as a woman might kneel beside the death-quiet face of her first-born: then, unashamed, as though she had been his wife for years, took his work-browned hand, held it awhile meekly to her breast, and kissed it. Pride,

shame, the presence of her affianced husband . . . what had she to do with these? and Steven dying.

"Poor dear Katharine! so soon overcome—such highly wrought nerves!" whispered Mrs. Dering, before whose mind a foreboding worse than death was arising.

"Poor Katharine—ay, poor indeed!" replied Lord Petres, with more agitation on his face than Mrs. Dering had ever seen it wear before. "Had not you and I better go, Mrs. Dering?" And he drew his future sister-in-law's hand under his arm. "We are not wanted here, I think."

They went back to the parlour, and listened silently (what could even Mrs. Dering, out of a world-wide stock of formulas, find to say just now?) to the heavy ticking of the old house-clock, to the dismal sound of the bats' wings, as they beat with ominous persistency against the window, to the mournful whine of Steven's little terrier in the porch outside. After five or six minutes had passed like this, Katharine came in. She closed the parlour-door, and walked up to her sister's side. Her features looked drawn and rigid. The soft brown eyes gleamed anguish-stricken from a marble-pale face. "You are going, I suppose," she said. God! could that be Katharine's voice? "So I thought I'd speak to you first. I shall stay here till—till——"

"Kate," cried Lord Petres, coming forward, and taking both her hands, "this is the bitterest hour of my life. I would have given everything I possess to have withheld Steven Lawrence from carrying the wager out. Don't *you* reproach me?"

"Reproach!" she repeated, neither returning his

pressure nor taking away her hands; just leaving them a cold leaden weight in his. "Why should I reproach you, Lord Petres? Steven Lawrence was tired of his life. I had spoilt it for him . . . and he threw it away . . . and my heart is broken! Who but me is there to reproach?"

"My dear Kate," said Mrs. Dering, "this is too sad! You are overcome to a most unnecessary extent, but you never *could* bear the sight of any one in pain, you know. Indeed, indeed, Lord Petres, I think it our positive duty to take Kate away!"

"Duty!" cried Katharine, and now her hands fell from Lord Petres', and she stood, looking blankly in Mrs. Dering's face. "Ah, I think I've heard that word a little too often! Wasn't it duty that made me turn from Steven long ago, when . . . when I cared for him—I may say it now! and it would have been my honour and my crown to have become his wife? Hasn't it been duty that has made me keep my engagement to you, Lord Petres? Through all these months, when my heart has been *here*, to promise, to mean still to marry you?"

"Katharine, Katharine, collect yourself!" exclaimed Mrs. Dering. "You are overwrought. You will bitterly repent all this romantic overstrained sentiment when you have had time to reflect. The carriage is waiting for us, and——"

"My place is here," interrupted Katharine, shortly. "Don't trouble yourself about me, Arabella! My place is here—by Steven. It pains me horribly . . . even yet . . . to tell the truth!" and as she said this she turned again towards Lord Petres. "To you, above all, Lord Petres, who have been truthful, generous to

me throughout, I thought, you know, I might have gone through my life without being *forced* to speak it! I thought when I was your wife I could hide, even from my own heart, how I had once cared for a man so much beneath me. But death—death levels all things . . . the truth is wrung from me at last! My place is at Ashcot, so long as there's a chance of Steven wanting me,—and I must stay here."

A flush, if not of absolute emotion, of something very near akin to it, had risen while Katharine was speaking over the solemn white face of little Lord Petres. He stood for a full minute, meditative; then, out of the upright soul of the man, free, for once, from all small selfishness, from all *poco curante* philosophy, real or affected, came these words. "You are right Kate, very right. Of course your place is with Lawrence—poor fellow! in his hour of need. I am more grateful to you, love you better, if that is possible, than ever, for speaking to me as you have spoken. Mrs. Dering, shall I see you to your carriage—you ordered it to wait? Mr. Hilliard, I know, means to stay at Ashcot, at least till the arrival of the surgeons, and so will I and Kate."

"Kate—stay here—at Ashcot!" stammered Mrs. Dering. "Ah! yes, and in the morning things will be explained between you, and——"

"And in the morning, and for ever after, we shall be to each other as we are now!" said Katharine. "What, do you think I could grieve for one man as I grieve for him who lies here to-night, and marry another to-morrow? Lord Petres," holding out her hand to him, "you know me better than that!"

Lord Petres took the cold hand she offered, and

carried it to his lips: "I know that I shall never alter towards you, Kate," he said, simply and gravely. "I know that to-morrow, or next day, or ten years hence, if it should chance—such things have been—that you change your mind, you will find me exactly the same as if to-night's explanation had not occurred." Then he took up his hat from the table, crossed the room, and with his accustomed elaborate courtesy, offered his arm to Mrs. Dering.

Poor Mrs. Dering! The universe was melting bodily beneath her feet. Katharine—the wedding invitations issued: preliminary announcements in the *Morning Post*; white silk, orange blossoms, all in readiness—had thrown herself at Steven Lawrence's side, kissed his hand, declared her love for him! A sister of her's, on the eve of making one of the best marriages in England, had declared, in the presence of her affianced husband her love for a working man! a working man who might or might not be dying—this was minutiae with which, at the present moment, Mrs. Dering's overburdened spirit could not be expected to trouble itself. Katharine deliberately, and for Steven Lawrence's sake, had broken off her engagement with Lord Petres! The world was in anarchy; the hideous result of democratic opinions, the horrible living spectre of Equality loosed before her: only one small olive-branch of hope visible—the arm of a peer of the realm at this present moment offered to herself!

She takes it, and quits the house; her silken skirts, with indignant rustle, sweeping down the plebeian farm-house flowers (that ride odorous and elastic instantly) on either side the garden path; and finds her-

self breathless, voiceless, in the hired carriage that brought her from the station. "To the Dene, mum?" says the country lad, touching his hat. "To the station!" answers Mrs. Dering, "and quick, that I may be in time for the last train to London." After which she shakes hands with Lord Petres; tries to murmur a fitting adieu, but finds no human speech adequate to the occasion; and so makes her exit. Another actor gone from the fast-closing story of Steven Lawrence's life.

Katharine Fane stood for a minute or more as they had left her. Then, the sound of the receding wheels telling her that she was indeed alone, she laid down her bonnet and shawl; not since Dora's days had the homely Ashcot chairs been honoured with freight so delicate!—and went back to the kitchen.

The tall figure of Barbara, such silent, tearless despair upon her fine old face!—confronted her as she entered. "I can do all he'll need, alone," she said. "I want no fine ladies here, Katharine Fane."

"Fine ladies!" repeated Katharine, sorrowfully. "I'm no fine lady—only a repentant woman, broken-hearted! *Won't* you have me here? I'll stay quiet, very quiet, at his side!"

"Your repentance comes too late!" said Barbara. But something in the "fine lady's" face or voice must have touched her, for she moved brusquely aside to let her pass. And after this, for another hour and a half, the two human hearts that loved him best kept mute watch together over poor unconscious Steven.

An hour and a half! At the end Katharine's reward came. He turned ever so little; something like colour passed over his ashen face, and his lips moved

... "Katharine." Old Barbara, who was bending over him, made a sign on this to Miss Fane to approach. And then, humbly, timidly, the "fine lady" crept up to Steven Lawrence's pillow; with soft, cold hand touched his forehead; stooped and whispered—shall I attempt to guess what words?—to senses that after the moment's awakening were already dull and unheeding once again.

About midnight the Squire and Lord Petres, still anxiously waiting in the little parlour, heard the approaching sound of carriage wheels; and this time were not disappointed; it was the Clithero doctor; and with him the surgeon who had come down by special train from London. The Squire crept on tip-toes to the kitchen, and beckoned Katharine out. Dimly she was conscious that Mr. Huntly wished her good evening; that some stranger bowed to her; that some other figure glided away as she entered the parlour. (Poor little Lord Petres! While she lives Katharine will never know how he stood that night cloakless, shivering in the porch, to leave her undisturbed; an act, from Lord Petres, rivalling some that have gained the Victoria Cross for other men!) Then the two surgeons, accompanied by Mr. Hilliard, went away to the kitchen, and she was left alone; to hope, to sicken with expectation, to despair:—Which heart among us but holds the memory—memory, alas! that needs no whetting!—of some such hour as this?"

... By the time the sound of approaching footsteps told her the consultation was over, day had risen: the cheerful farm-yard noises were stirring behind the house, the larks singing above the clover-fields, blithely as if to-day should usher no pain, no death into the

world. Katharine walked across to the open parlour-door, and there, numbed, passive, waited—to hear the worst. The London surgeon's was the first face she saw. A few uncertain words she faltered out, then stopped. Now that the moment had come, her lips *could* not frame themselves into the question she had coveted, through this eternity of suspense, to ask!

"There is cause for gravest anxiety, dear lady," said the surgeon, very gently. (Horrible, if Mrs. Dering had but known it, he judged, not from silks and laces, but from the quivering lip, the suppliant voice, that this woman was his patient's wife!) "But Mr. Lawrence is young, and has a constitution so unbroken that we may hope——"

"Hope!" And upon this a great sob broke from Katharine's heart, and she heard no more.

CHAPTER XXV.

The Sale of Ashcot.

FOR more than a week it was a hand-to-hand struggle: for one hour life seeming to have a chance of victory, for the next, death. And during this time, while Steven was unconscious, or conscious only at fitful intervals, Katharine Fane watched beside his pillow. Mrs. Dering wrote her expostulatory notes, never answered, or perhaps opened. The Clithero world talked and grew silent. Barbara rebelled for half a day against the invasion of Ashcot by "any more o' them Fanes, with their gentry's fancies—giving trouble, and fussing, and the Lord's hand heavy on the house!" Then finding that this member of the Fane family had no fancies and gave no trouble; finding, too, that her

presence soothed Steven more than all Mr. Huntly's physic, she endured her services; nay, thanked her for them, would bring her tea or food, and order her to take it. "If not for your own sake, Ma'am, for his." An order which (coming from poor Barbara's lips) Katharine, many a time, well-nigh choked herself, sooner than disobey.

Nine days this lasted: then Steven began to mend; was too weak to move in his bed; but was able to take whatever nourishment they allowed him, and when he spoke—fever, and the delirium of fever alike past, spoke reasonably. As soon as things reached this point Katharine took herself quietly away from Ashcot. A niece of Barbara's was sent for from Canterbury to do the housework, and Barbara, alone and unaided, waited on her master in his convalescence.

It was midsummer when the doctors pronounced his danger over. By August, Steven, a shadow of himself, tottering, hollow-eyed, was able to creep about the garden on a stick, or sit out in the sunshine beneath the porch. He did not progress, the doctors said, as he had done at first. Not a single bodily symptom was bad: he slept without fever at night; ate tolerably; his injured arm was going on all right; but still his progress was slow. "Lawrence wants heart in himself," Mr. Huntly said at last to Barbara. "There's no need for me to physic him any more. All he wants is interest in his own recovery. Now, if you could persuade him to get change, if it was only ten miles away, it would do him good."

Barbara received this advice in silence; thought it over while she cooked the dinner; then when Steven as usual had gone out into the porch to smoke—he was

allowed two half-pipes of mildest tobacco daily—came and stood by him. “A fine afternoon, Steven. Not so hot as it was yesterday, I’m thinking.”

He went on silently with his pipe. During the last few days he had got strangely taciturn; never answering any questions save those positively forced upon him. “Now if you was to have out the spring-cart and the old mare, and let James drive you a bit? just get a breath of fresh air if ’twas only a couple of miles off?”

He shook his head, and still made no answer.

“Well,” said Barbara, “we’ve all our own ways of thinking, but if I’d been sick to death, and there had been them that had come, and sent—ay, three and four times a day—to ask for me, I’d have the civility to give them a thank-you for their pains as I mended! There’s the Squire, as you know, here every morning of his life, and when you were ill and at your worst, Miss Katharine was scarcely away from Ashcot. But it’s no concern of mine, any of it!” And Barbara, at this point, made a feint of retreating into the house.

Steven laid down his pipe. “Come here, Barbara; you always go away when I want you. Did . . . did Katharine Fane really come to ask for me when I was ill?”

“She was here every day of her life,” said Barbara, jesuitically.

“Come nearer, sit down. Is she married yet? I have never remembered to ask the Squire.”

“Katharine Fane is not married, or wasn’t yesterday.”

“But engaged to Lord Petres, all the same?”

"Why do you ask, lad? What should I know of Katharine Fane's love affairs?"

"Well, I'll tell you, Barbara. I'd strange thoughts in my head when I was ill, and I don't rightly know yet which were real and which were false Now, I could have sworn I remember some one besides you standing at times by my bedside!" cried Steven, looking at her eagerly as he spoke.

"Mr. Huntly stood there, and the London doctor, and the Squire, and as you bettered, my niece Marianne," said Barbara, sententiously.

"Ah, I see! My brain was confused. I talked, I raved a great deal, didn't I?"

"A great deal, Steven. No need to go over all this now."

"I'll never speak of it after to-day. Just tell me what *kind* of nonsense I used to talk, and—and if any one but you listened to it?"

"You must go to some one with less on their minds than me, if you want a sick man's ravings remembered," said Barbara. "You talked of those that are dead and gone, I mind, ay, and of scenes that were no credit to you, too, Steven! 'So much on this card, so much on this,' and French words (you, that in your right mind, can know no more o' the French than me) and of a lady and page, this for hours and hours together; a lady and page looking down and mocking you from the wall, and nothing there but the picture of your poor grandfather, that never mocked man nor child in his life."

"And this was all? Don't deceive me; this kind of rubbish was all? And no one heard me but you?"

"Steven, I told you just now I'd no memory for

sick men's ravings; I've heard too many of them in my life!"

"Barbara," he turned his face slowly away, and began to trace elaborate cyphers with his stick upon the gravel, "did . . . Katharine Fane ever stand by my side when I was sick?"

"She did," answered Barbara, without a moment's hesitation. "The Squire was there, too, and me—it was the day your fever was at its head. The Squire's family couldn't have thought more of you if you'd been one of themselves by blood," she added, "and that's why I say you might have the manners to ride over and return them thanks now."

"Go and bid James harness the old mare. I'll start at once. *At once*,—do you hear? I've had a thought in my head for a week or more past, and now I'm decided. I'll carry it out to-day."

"But you'll put on one of your cloth suits, Steven? and I've made you a best silk sling, and——"

"*Will* you go and order the cart round at once? this moment!" he cried, petulantly.

"And you'll put on a cloth suit, dear, while they harness Peggy?"

"I'll do nothing of the kind. I'll never put on any more gentleman's clothes while I live. I'm going to speak to the Squire on business—shan't see either of the ladies, I guess—and this suit will do as well as any other. Now go at once, Barbara; don't be obstinate."

And in ten minutes time Steven, for the first time since his accident, drove away from Ashcot; Barbara, her hand to her eyes, watching him with curious expression, as she stood a moment before shutting the

great yard-gates after the cart. The weather was sweet as spring, though the fields were already ripe for harvest. But, cool as it was, the exertion of passing even at Peggy's pace through the fresh air made Steven faint; and by the time the cart stopped before the house door at the Dene, his face was almost as white as on that evening when Katharine had looked upon it, and believed it the face of death in Ashcot kitchen.

"The Squire is out, and Mrs. Hilliard has not left her room, but do you come in, Mr. Lawrence," said the rosy Clithero girl, Katharine's own maid, who chanced to answer the bell. "Miss Fane is at home, and do you come in, sir, and rest after your ride." And, with the ready compassion all women feel for a strong man in his weakness, the girl ran forward, holding out a plump wrist to aid him in his descent, then ushered him across the cool flower-scented hall (past the spot where he and Katharine had bidden farewell upon his wedding-day!) to the drawing-room.

The door opened and closed; and Miss Fane, fairer it seemed to him than ever, in her soft summer dress, came out of the recess of the bay-window that looked towards Ashcot. She drew close to her visitor; held his hand; murmured a kindly word or two of welcome; looked up with sorrowful eyes at his haggard face, at the gaunt big figure upon which the clothes hung so loosely, at the disabled arm in its sling—then, shyly letting his hand go, bade him sit down in her mother's invalid chair, and returned to her own place four or five feet at least away from him. "It is very thoughtful

of you to come and see us so soon," she said, after a minute's silence.

"I came because I wanted to thank you, Miss Fane!" answered Steven. Her heart sank at the weak altered sound of his voice. "The Squire has been very good in calling so often, and Barbara tells me, when I was at my worst, you used to come to Ashcot to ask after me yourself. I thank you, and him too, for having so far forgiven me."

"Forgiven!" said Katharine. Oh, never speak of that now. All the forgiveness that was needed was from you to us."

"I thank you," went on Steven, "and, before coming to the business part of my visit, I want to say one other thing. It was by my own obstinacy alone that I met with the accident. Lord Petres did as much as a man could do to keep me from carrying out my bet. I hope you know this!"

She held down her face, and faltered something about her being sure that Lord Petres, in every action of his life, would act generously and uprightly to others.

"I'm glad to hear you speak so," said Steven, looking at her narrowly. "Since my accident foolish fancies of all kinds have run in my head, and among them, at times, was the fancy that you and Lord Petres were not such good friends as you used to be. Don't think me presuming when I say I should have grieved to have found that true."

"Lord Petres and I are as good friends as ever," said Katharine, still with downcast face; "but that is all. Our engagement is at an end—has been so for many a week past."

"More's the pity," said Steven. "I hope you won't mind me saying so, but I'd rather, much, have thought of you as married to Lord Petres than to any other man, when I am far away."

"You will have to think of me as Katharine Fane, now and always," she cried, "and . . . I don't know what you mean by far away! Are Ashcot and the Dene to be divided again then? We had hoped not."

"Ashcot and the Dene may very soon be one," said Steven. "It was about that I wanted to speak to the Squire—but perhaps you will give him my message? I'm going back to America this fall—please God I get my strength again! and Ashcot will be sold. Lord Haverstock would be glad to have a good part of it, I know, but the land lies so compact and handy, and has belonged to our name so long, I'd sooner it should all go to one buyer. I have it in my mind," he went on, "that the Squire likes the farm, just from words he has dropped at times about this field or the other; and so, if you'll tell him, please, with my duty, I came to offer him the refusal of it to-day. After all that's past and gone, I should be glad, Miss Katharine, to think Ashcot belonged to your family at last."

He had got back just to his old respectful way of speaking to her; to the way he had when he was a boy, and used to gather bunches of cowslips and ladies-smocks for "little Miss Kate" in the lanes. And Katharine's heart sank lower and lower. Once more she saw her dearest chance of happiness drifting from her, and pride—no: a thousand times no: not pride now! only the invincible, instinctive shame of her woman's

nature forbade her to stretch out a hand towards its rescue.

"Of course if you wish to go, you will go; and I'll give papa your message. Strange," with a quickly-checked sigh this, "that you should insist upon living the life of a savage in the wilderness, instead of staying quietly among your friends in England."

"Ah," answered Steven, "it's very good of you to speak so, but the wilderness suits me best. My life, from the first day I came back to England 'till this, has been one long mistake. Unstable though I am in most ways, I *can't* get over my savage habit of remembering things, Miss Katharine, there's the truth! During the last two years I've tried, as you know, to forget what . . . what will go with me to my grave. Since my disgrace fell on me—you'll forgive me for speaking so, this once? I have tried to live it down—by force, you understand, and at times it comes back upon me keener, more intolerable than I felt it at the first! Such a life as I lead now couldn't go on much longer. I haven't the stuff in me, as I told you long ago, to keep me straight (without one influence that I've missed!). If I stayed in Ashcot I should just drift into such a life, most probably die such a death, as Josh's, and——"

"Never!" interrupted Katharine, a sudden colour on her face. "You have been ill, you speak with a sick man's impatience. It is not in your nature to sink to such a life as you speak of."

"But I think I know that it *is*!" said Steven, with complete sincerity. "I've stayed in Ashcot for about fifteen months now—poor old Barbara for my companion, the work of the farm to fill up my time—and

I know that I have stayed there long enough! The only life fit for a man like me is what you call the life of a savage in the wilderness, a life where there's no need, at all events, to play at danger over a bit of broken fence:" he glanced down at his disabled arm: "or to seek excitement, as I did in Paris, out of kings and aces! Old Klaus (my mate I've often told you of) is expecting me—I've a letter from him in my pocket now, and, please God I get strong and have the sale of Ashcot settled, I'll be in New Orleans before Christmas! There's no one to be wronged by my determination," he went on. "I haven't a relation belonging to me of the name of Lawrence, and I shall settle Barbara comfortably in Stanner's cottage—that I must see about with the Squire, if he buys the farm—before I go."

And now Steven rose; feebly, slowly, and seemed disposed to take his leave. "Some day," he said, "I shall ask you for a photograph to carry away with me—of the Squire."

"Yes."

"And a photograph of the Dene, if you will give it to me?"

"Certainly."

"And perhaps—you haven't any, I suppose, that you could spare of yourself?"

"I have a vignette, like the one that was sent to you in Mexico," said Katharine, hanging her head. "Here it is," loosening a clasp of her chain; "a conceited thing you will say to wear one's own portrait! but you left the locket here one day . . . that day I tore up the photograph, do you remember? and I was

sorry afterwards, and put another in its place, and—and I have kept it for you!”

And after a separation of more than two years, the poor Vera Cruz locket once more lay in Steven’s hand.

He opened it, examined it, looked down, as if comparing the copy with the original, on Miss Fane’s face. “You have changed a great deal, since then,” he said. “This is the picture of a girl’s face! and yet—yet I believe I’d rather have a picture of you as you are!”

A pale little smile came round Katharine’s lips. “You are as flattering as ever!” she said. “Give me back the picture of my ‘girl’s face,’ and I’ll be photographed, expressly to please you, old and plain as I am now.”

Steven held the locket tight within his hand. “If you will, you may give me another,” he said, coming closer to her side; “but I’ll never let the girl’s face go again—never!”

He did not look much like a sick man at this minute. The hue of returning health was on his cheek; the eagerness of youth, of life, of passion, in his blue eyes. Suddenly Katharine raised her face; for a moment faltered, and turned awfully white: then, “Steven, *why* must you leave us all again?” she cried, and held out two soft clasped hands for him to take.

She had stooped—to conquer—at last; stooped, and won the happiness of her life.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Conclusion.

It did not, you may be sure, take very long to gain the Squire's consent; and even poor Mrs. Hilliard, after her first pathetic exclamation, "What, is Steven Lawrence going to marry *everybody*?" resigned herself, unmurmuringly, to the prospect of having her favourite child settled within two miles of herself for life.

Barbara, therefore, was the only person high in authority left to propitiate, and Barbara, Miss Fane decided, should be won by her powers of persuasion, not by Steven's. Accordingly next morning the Squire's dog-cart drove over at an early hour to Ashcot, and while Mr. Hilliard waited outside in the lane, Katharine walked up alone, with a beating heart, to where Steven was watching for her beneath the porch. Katharine Fane, with a beating heart, walking up to the old farm-house—a suppliant for Barbara's leave to become its mistress!

"Barbara," cried Steven, stepping outside the porch, and looking up at one of the bedroom windows, "you are wanted—quick! Here is Miss Fane come to see you."

There was a minute or two of silence; then the old woman's dignified step was heard descending the stairs, and erect, self-possessed (but not, Katharine thought, with the hardest expression of all upon her face) Barbara came out into the porch, and stood before her visitor. She was dressed in her Sunday gown, with whitest cap and neckerchief. Katharine's eyes detected these omens of good promise in a second, and

she spoke out boldly. "You expected me, Barbara, I'm sure you did. You know what I have come to say?"

"I expected my Minister," answered Barbara, coolly. "Steven, are you mindful that Mr. Lyte comes for private thanksgiving over your recovery at noon?"

"I had forgotten all about him," said Steven; "but he'll be welcome. Never man had greater need, or better heart to offer thanksgiving than me!"

Another silence; the bees humming round the honeysuckles, the tide washing upon the distant sands, as on the day of Steven's first unexpected return to Ashcot. "And you don't know—you can't guess, at all, what I've got to say to you?" cried Katharine at last.

"I shall know when I'm told," answered Barbara. "It's ill for plain folks like me to be set guessing at this age of the world."

"Barbara," coming close to the old servant's side, and holding up her lips to be kissed, "Steven wishes to marry me, and I asked him to let me be the first to tell you. Will you like me for his sake?" . . .

. . . "I known how it would be weeks ago," said Barbara; her face all aglow with the reflected happiness it caught from Steven's. "I known from the hour the lad mended that I should see you back some day—but 'twas no place of mine to speak."

"And you will like me for his sake, Barbara?"

"And for your own, Ma'am. I have done that from the first day you helped me nurse him."

"And of all my conquests, I hold my conquest over Barbara to be the greatest," said Katharine, when an hour or two later (the Minister's thanksgiving-visit

over; the patient little Squire sent back to the Dene) she was alone with Steven on the sea-walk. "Now you will sit down, please, with the beech-tree to support you—yes, and let me put this plaid around you, sir! You are in my charge, and must obey." And then, just on the spot where she had rejected him, Katharine took her place, lowly, lovingly at Steven Lawrence's side, and felt herself the proudest woman on the earth.

. . . Why speak of other things? Of the world's surprise—of Mrs. Dering's horror! even of Lord Petres' letter of congratulation, in which personal regret and desire for Katharine's happiness were so generously expressed, so delicately blended? Why take from, or add to, the prettiest picture life ever gives us—the picture of two long-parted, reconciled lovers who love indeed!

During many a future month; for the engagement, it was decided, must be a long one; they saw each other daily, and every day passed like those first golden hours in Ashcot garden. Once, only once, there was a difference of opinion between them, and this was because Katharine, womanlike, would argue on controversial subjects, beyond Steven's comprehension, and was over in five minutes. "If you knew how I longed to see you changed," she said, after a masterly side-attack upon the errors of dissent; "if you knew how my heart yearns towards the old true church, you would concede so much to me! Oh Steven, we are to lead one life! Can we not hold one hope—one religion together, for the future?"

"Why, to be sure we can!" answered Steven, opening his blue eyes wide at the question; "only, of

course, you'll never ask me to leave Shiloh on a Sunday. I should no more be made a churchman by going to churchmen's places of worship, than I was made a fine gentleman by wearing fine gentlemen's clothes in Paris. 'Tis true I never looked into the real difference between church and meeting-house," he added, with humility; "but it strikes me that, unless both are false, both must be true, in their way, and it's just a matter of birth which you belong to. Now, I was born a Wesleyan."

And Katharine, who had been keeping in reserve a whole array of irresistible polemical argument, was silenced. Through his love for her Steven Lawrence might be swayed in most things, she knew (had she not brought him to think forgivingly, at last, of a lonely grave in Père la Chaise!). In his hereditary working-man's beliefs, social and religious, she would do wisest, perhaps, to take him as she had first known, first loved him. And so, for the future, she took him—the dream of a picturesque church, all music, and incense, and painted angels! laid, with many another dream, for ever aside—and was contented.

Winter came and went; February melted into sunshine; and it was high time, the Squire began to think, for something more substantial than love to be spoken of. But Steven, in the matter of settlements, was obstinate. He had his farm; and Katharine had two hundred a year of her own; and—he hoped Mr. Hil-liard would forgive him? but they would both rather not accept further riches. So in the fresh spring evenings, while the lovers were wandering out-of-doors amidst east wind and damp and thinking it summer, all the Squire had to console himself with were fire-

side projects of what he could do for them in the future.

Whether it was good for the world to grow more radical or more conservative; whether the lines of demarcation between class and class ought or ought not to be maintained, were irrelevant questions that he had long ago ceased to think of. The only democratic possibility that concerned himself (possibility over which his kind heart loved in silence to brood) was . . . that the feet of Katharine Lawrence's children should one day tread the old paths at the Dene; the voices of Katharine's children call the old house, home! All very well for lovers, in the heyday of courtship, to talk about two hundred a year and Ashcot farm being riches. A time might come when Kate, and Steven too, would be glad enough to find that other people had had a little more sense, a little less sentiment, than themselves!

So prophesied the Squire. Meanwhile the lovers held stoutly to their own misguided opinions; and at last, when the world was green again, when hedgerow and orchard were hung in bridal white, were married.

THE END.

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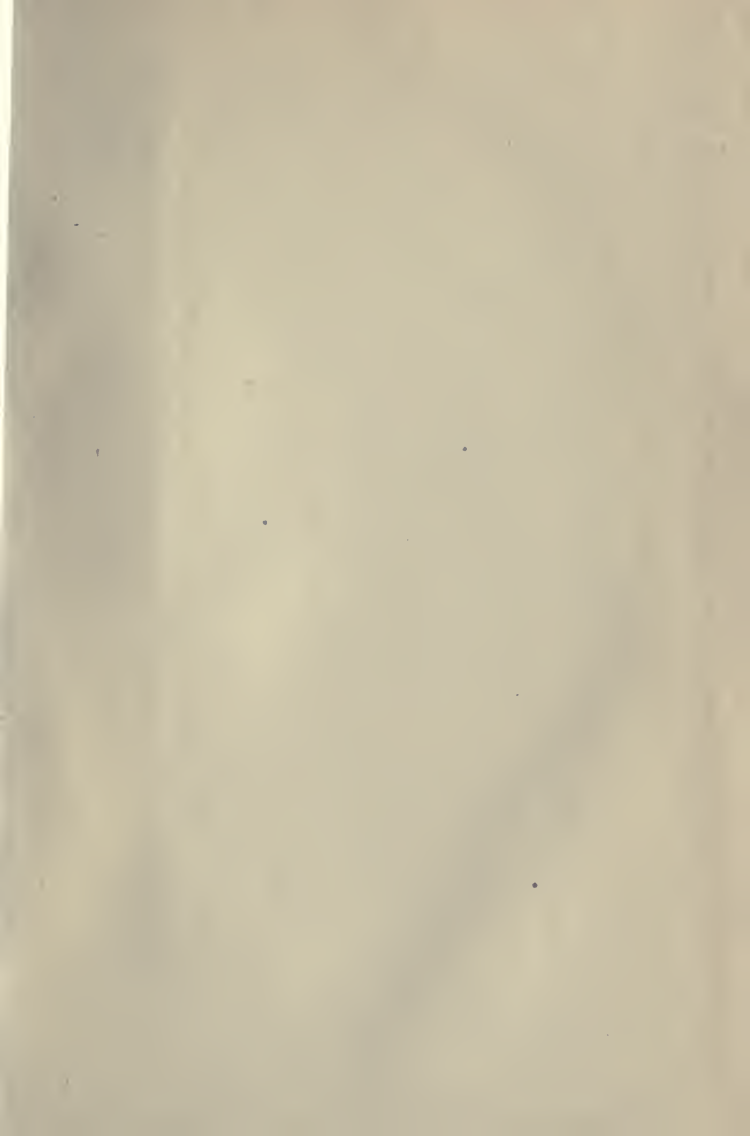
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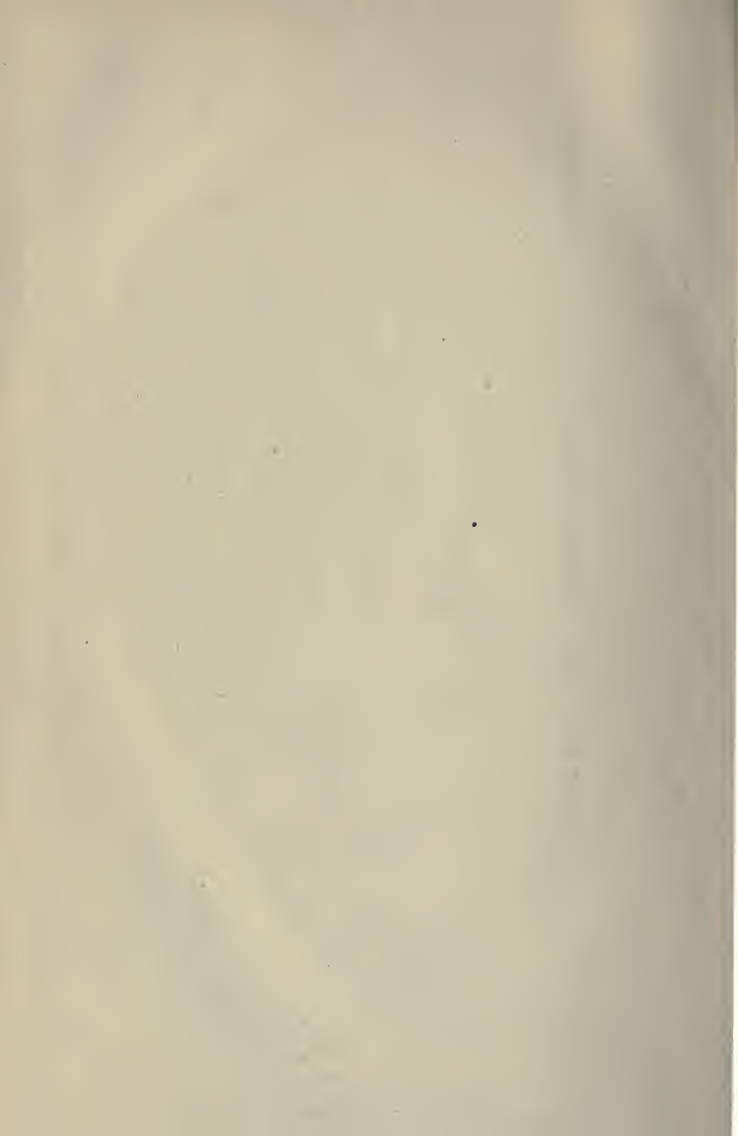
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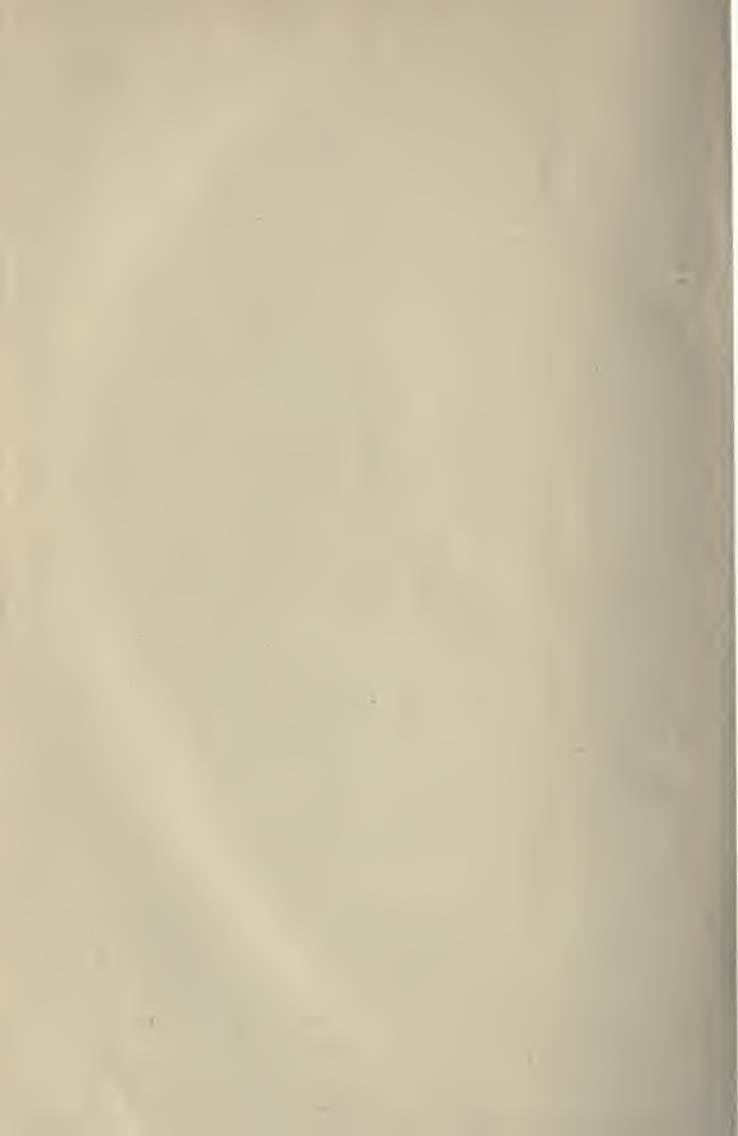
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